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Engaging in First-Person Narratives
with a focus on [illegible] engaging first-person narratives
in [illegible], [illegible], and A Long Way From Verona

by

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Engaging in First-Person Narration

ABSTRACT

The dissertation posits three types of first-person narration: immediate-engaging, distant-engaging, and distancing narration. The focus is on immediate-engaging-first-person narration in three young adult novels: Bernice Thurman Hunter's *That Scatterbrain Booky* (1981), Jean Fritz's *Homesick: My Own Story* (1982), and Jane Gardam's *A Long Way From Verona* (1971). The distinguishing features of immediate-engaging-first-person narration are that irony is often restricted to verbal irony, which is shared by the narrator and the narratee, and the short temporal span between the narrated events and the time of narration (usually within a year). Immediate-engaging-first-person narration is rare in "adult" literature, where the use of first-person is usually distant-engaging or distancing and therefore can use dramatic, romantic or structural irony as well as verbal irony and where the narrating agent is more clearly discernible. Immediate-engaging-first-person narration is used predominantly in young adult literature where it is not unusual for an entire novel to be about the recent past. Immediate narration can be either active or passive. Active-immediate narration refers to the narrator's use of direct address to the narratee, as is the case in*Verona* where the narrator periodically addresses "you." Passive-narration refers to the use of implied address, which never overtly identifies the narratee in any way. The narrator's voice is often a blend of the focalizer and the implied author, as in *Booky* and *Homesick*.. A blended voice allows a variety of details to be explained without authorial intrusion. In order to further explain the process of narrative engagement, Roland Barthes' concept of the

readerly and writerly text and of readerly and writerly reading, which explains how the reader works on the text, has been extended to readerly and writerly engagement, which examines how the text works on the reader. Writerly engagement is explored in relation to the use of illustrations in *Booky*. Readerly engagement is discussed in relation to *Verona*. The premise is that writerly engagement asks the reader to notice the openings in the text while readerly engagement asks the reader to notice connections. The first chapter of the dissertation outlines the elements of narrative theory necessary to the discussion of each of the novels in relation to their respective genres, *Booky* as Bildungsroman, *Homesick* as autobiography and *Verona* as Künstlerroman, in the following three chapters.

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INTRODUCTION

> "To hell with school. English is what matters. ENGLISH IS LIFE." (*Verona* 12)

> We build houses because we are alive; we write books because we know we're mortal. We live in packs because we're gregarious; we read because we know we're alone. Reading offers companionship that fills no void, yet no other being can take its place. It offers no definitive explanation of our destiny, yet it weaves a tight web of complicity between the world and ourselves. Tiny, secret acts of complicity that speak of the paradoxical joy of living, even as they illuminate the tragic absurdity of life. Our reasons for reading are as eccentric as our reasons for living. No outsider can demand an explanation of that secret intimacy. (Pennac "The Reader's Bill of Rights": 10. The right not to defend your tastes.)

According to Lois Kuznets, "first-person narration has been the most striking development in realistic fiction for young people" (190). Children's and young adult first-person narratives in which events are narrated roughly within a year after they have taken place are particularly engaging because of their immediacy. This kind of immediacy, sustained throughout an entire novel, appears to be a distinguishing feature of children's literature. Reviewers and critics often apply the word "engaging" to narrators of intimate or immediate narration in describing the quality of the narrative. In my analysis, I put this popular and descriptive term to use in a specific theoretical context. I examine three "immediate-engaging-first-person" young adult narratives, Bernice Thurman Hunter's *That Scatterbrain Booky,* Jean Fritz's *Homesick: My Own Story,* and Jane Gardam's *A Long Way From Verona,* not to explain my "secret intimacy" with them, but to probe the complicity that results from the act of narrative engagement which, in a first-person narrative, can create a close relationship between the reader and the writer (or the fictional writer).

In the process of defining my topic I have repeatedly been tempted off the narrow track I have finally chosen to follow. These books open up a number of related issues for discussion, the role of social expectations in the development of girls through early and middle adolescence and the implications of historical fiction on the representation of character, for example. In the end, I have chosen to focus on two related questions: What is engaging about first-person narration? And, why is immediate-engaging-first-person narration so prevalent in writing for adolescents?

Young adult literature is preoccupied with self-development. Three genres that lend themselves particularly well both to this theme and to first-person narration are the Bildungsroman, autobiography and the Künstlerroman. The

Bildungsroman is typically a retrospective narrative wherein a hero recounts his 'adventures' in coming to terms with his role in society. Autobiography is the author's story of her life and personality. It is also a retrospective narrative as is the Künstlerroman, which narrates an artist's struggle to perfect her craft. All three genres are typically defined from an adult viewpoint in which an older, wiser narrator refects back on his past and narrates the events which have brought him to his present vantage point. Irony has been identified by many critics and theorists of all three genres as an indispensable component of the narrative.[1] In reflecting back on her youth the narrator presents her lack of experience with an irony finetuned by hindsight.

All three genres have been adapted by authors writing for children and young adults. Some adhere to the basic formula of the genre (for example, *A Little Tiger in the Chinese Night: an Autobiography in Art* traces Song Nan Zhang's life from childhood through to a critical point in adulthood) and maintain the adult narrator, while others do not. In the three novels I discuss, there is a central point of difference between the genres as adapted in writing for children and the genres as they are defined for "adult" consumption. The difference is the use of immediate-engaging-first-person narration. This precludes both an adult narrator and the use of dramatic, romantic and structural irony in the representation of the narrator-protagonist.[2]

The secretive overtones of journal, diary and letter form permeate the first-person narrative and are vital to the pact between the teller/writer and the listener/reader. The pact is to reveal a past. The I reveals either an immediate or a distant past. The narrator of a distant past, a feature of most "adult" narratives, is more likely to be judgemental and ironic in her presentation of herself. In young adult literature the young narrator-protagonist narrates events in her immediate past; thus, whatever self-development has occurred has not had the chance to have long-term ramifications and therefore does not invite, or warrant, much conclusive commentary. The narrator's stance toward herself as a character in the story is bound to have an effect on the narratee, an effect that is markedly different in a "children's" narrative. In *The Only Teller* Hetty Clews explains the inevitability of a relationship between I, the teller, and you, the listener: "The possibilities inherent in self disclosure are many. But whatever the mode and whatever the motive, the effect of personal interaction is inescapable. The reader cannot avoid being aware of the 'I' as a personality to whom he must respond" (18). The I asks unspoken questions, awaits inevitable reactions: *How do you like me? How do you like my story? Do you believe me? Am I interesting?* The reactions to these questions are dependent on the perceived gap between the narrated I (the *then* of the narration) and the narrating I (the *now* of the narration). The smaller the gap, the more immediate the narration.

---

[1] For example, Richard Coe, Philippe Lejeune, Rita Felski.

[2] I base my usage of these terms on M. H. Abrams definitions. Thus, "dramatic irony involves a situation in a play or a narrative in which the audience shares with the author knowledge of which a character is ignorant: the character acts in a way grossly inappropriate to the circumstances, or expects the opposite of what fate holds in store, or says something that anticipates the actual outcome, but not at all in the way that he means it" (82). In a work exhibiting structural irony "the author, instead of using an occasional verbal irony, introduces a structural feature which serves to sustain the duplicity of meaning. One common device of this sort is the invention of a naive hero, or else a naive narrator or spokesman, whose invincible simplicity leads him to persist in putting an interpretation on affairs which the knowing reader—who penetrates to, and shares, the implicit point of view of the authorial presence behind the naive persona—just as persistently is able to alter and correct" (81). Finally, romantic irony "designate[s] a mode of dramatic or narrative writing in which the author builds up artistic illusion, only to break it down by revealing that he, as artist, is the arbitrary creator and manipulator of his characters and their actions" (83).

In answering the question "What is engaging about first-person narration?" with regard to the three texts I have chosen, I emphasize the relationship between the narrator and the narratee. As a reader of these texts, I have found it easy to project myself into each narrative world, to become a listener in the story, as it were. This, however, is only the subjective aspect of narrative engagement. The objective aspects are based on quantifiable matters, like the passage of time, and identifiable matters, like the kind of irony used. I begin with the objective elements of immediate-engaging-first-person narration before moving to its more subjective aspects and a more thorough discussion of the novels.

The first chapter of this study, "Engaging in first-person narration," examines important terms in narrative theory, like narrator and narratee and the role of focalization, in relation to first-person narration. Drawing on Robyn Warhol's work on the engaging narrator, I examine the difference between engaging narrators and engaging narrative interventions. Following this examination I address the issue of the narrator's reliability in immediate-engaging-first-person narration with particular regard to the use of irony. I propose two basic types of engagement: one in which the address is implied and therefore the reader is not specifically addressed, which I call passive engagement, and another in which the use of direct address to a "you" repeatedly reminds the reader of his relation to the narrator as the listener in the story, which I call active engagement. I also consider the application of Roland Barthes' terms, readerly and writerly, in the definition of two forms of narrative engagement. Here I begin to argue that *Booky* and *Homesick* are examples of writerly engagement, whereas *A Long Way From Verona* is an example of readerly engagement.

In chapter two, "Booky's Bildung: Writerly Engagement," I consider the evolution of the genre of the Bildungsroman and argue that the genre is also used as a model for detailing a character's experiences in young adult literature. A discussion of the first chapter of *Booky* closely examines what is engaging about the narrator and her narrative, the use of a blended voice for the narrator (a blend of the implied author and the focalizer) and demonstrates how the narrative introduces the implied reader to the narrator's world and draws her into Booky's family life through the use of detail and suspense. Then I discuss the use of writerly engagement in which the effect of metalepsis, the crossing of planes between reality and fiction, particularly through the use of illustrations, opens a complex discussion of the narrator caught between the text and the world, a relationship that is key in the Bildungsroman and that suggests a significant overlap between Booky's story and Bernice Thurman Hunter's.

Chapter three, "Engaging in childhood: *Homesick* as autobiography," begins with an exploration of childhood knowledge and what we can know about childhood through autobiographical writing as exemplified by Jean's narrative and the story she tells herself about who she is. Because childhood is an important aspect of autobiography and because Richard Coe has proposed a separate form of autobiography called the childhood, there is a more in-depth focus on genre in this chapter. Following the discussion of the relationship between "childhood" and "knowledge" in *Homesick* is a consideration of definitions of autobiography that leads to a discussion of the autobiography of childhood as a form of immediate-engaging-first-person narration. The chapter concludes by advocating the recognition of childhoods narrated by children and adolescents in the larger arena of autobiography. Here again the immediacy of the narration and the focus on the child's perspective are integral to the engaging narration.

Chapter four, "Jessica Vye, 'writer beyond all possible doubt': Direct Address and Readerly Engagement," discusses the novel as a readerly text and examines the narrator's strategies of narration, an important feature of the genre of the Künstlerroman, which not only presents a portrait of the artist but also explores the techniques employed by the artist in her work. It also looks closely at the first chapter of *A Long Way From Verona* in order to examine the use of direct address and verbal irony. Next is a discussion of the narrator's reliability followed by a discussion of the importance of young adult as a category. The chapter concludes with a consideration of how *Verona* compares to what Peter Hollindale terms an "adolescent novel of ideas." And finally, the conclusion considers the benefit of stretching the definitions of these three genres both to writing for children and adolescents and the benefit of distinguishing between different kinds of first-person narration in order to help readers describe their engagement in a text both on a technical and on a personal level.

Jane Gardam's *A Long Way From Verona*, Jean Fritz's *Homesick: My Own Story*, and Bernice Thurman Hunter's *That Scatterbrain Booky* have a number of points in common: they are narrated in the first person by the main character, a girl between the ages of ten and thirteen. The narrator-protagonist hopes to become a writer. Her story is largely about negotiating the transition from childhood into adulthood, or, more precisely, from girlhood into young womanhood. All the books are rich in issues pertinent to young adults and can be linked in many ways.

The *Booky* trilogy follows the general form of a Bildungsroman and appears to be a fictional autobiography. However, it has no particular plot other than the inevitability of growing up. The use of photographs and archival material blurs the grey line between fact and fiction and between character and person. By deconstructing the assumptions we make about simple stories and the necessary power of plot to maintain reader engagement, *Booky* demonstrates that an engaging narrative can be simple and segmented.

Homesick is an autobiography of the author's childhood which is described in the author's foreword as autobiographical fiction. The line between fact and fiction, person and character is not so much blurred as it is apparently rendered invisible, and yet the critical reader's awareness that truth is always interpreted and that stories are more than a collection of "facts" helps to outline the distinction between character and "real person" and between a life story and a lived life. (I say "lived life" rather than "life experience" in order to suggest all aspects of living.) *Homesick* connects the lure of "true" life stories with the conviction of first-person narration. Photographs and personal archival material are also used in this novel together with a historical essay to explicate the setting. The effect is to validate the autobiographical over the fictional, whereas in *Booky* the process is not so straightforward because the links between narrative and "illustration" are uncertain.

A Long Way From Verona follows the form of the Künstlerroman. Although links can be made between the narrator-protagonist's experiences and the author's, they are not overt. Unlike *Booky* and *Homesick, Verona* does not tempt the reader to collapse the identities of the author and the narrator. Because the narrator is such a strong character, I am tempted to make a reversed connection; I am surprised not to find Jessica Vye, the narrator's name, on the front cover even though I know she is not a "real person." Part of the narrator-protagonist's strength results from her use of *direct address*, which sets up quite a different relationship with the narratee, or listener, than Booky or Jean have (they use *implied address*) because of the narrator's direct address to "you"—a periodic reminder to the reader that she is a listener in the story. Furthermore, *A Long Way from Verona* is unquestionably a literary novel.[1] One might say that it is deceptively difficult rather than deceptively simple. *Verona* is exacting because it posits a literate reader, but it is not inaccessible to young readers.

Each narrator's character is, predictably, marked by her experiences; her character is reflected in her narrative style. Booky is an average, likeable, passionate girl who experiences a gradual improvement in her lot as a result of education and hard work. Hers is a straightforward, simple, yet substantial narrative which, though told in the first-person, chronicles her family's experiences as well as her own. Jean wants to be an ordinary American but is always conscious of her differences, no matter where she is. Her narrative shares the accessible and direct qualities of Booky's narrative, but is a story about a formative experience rather than a series of representative significant events. Jean's narrative places a greater emphasis on how events affect her personally, which is due, in part, to her isolation from peers and family. Jessica starts off by stating that she is not quite normal, a fact which she finds bothersome at times but which also gives her a certain license that she clearly enjoys. Her narrative is self-reflexive not only about her experience but also about how she is conveying that experience in her writing. From one novel to the next, in the order I discuss them, there is a progressive increase in the narrator-protagonist's sense of isolation and an increase in the character's "bookishness," or literary bent, and the narratives become increasingly more "classical"[1] in their representation of the narrator as a kind of hero. Although all three novels I discuss are first-person narratives, each is a distinct form thereof and thus each book engages the reader differently and achieves and sustains different levels of engagement.

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[1] I use literary as a descriptive terms rather than as an evaluative term.

As a point of clarification I wish to note that I use the term young adult advisedly and obstinately. Like any categorical term it is more nebulous than it is clear. Thus I resort to other terms in order to achieve clarity by contiguity: children's literature, literature for adolescents, writing for youth and even "adult" literature. "Adult" only ever seems to become a qualifier of literature in the context of discussions about "non-adult" literature, which generally means literature published in a publishing house's junior division. However, there is also a series of more specific categories with a more limited range, like "juvenile" literature. The problem is that the boundaries of these categories keep shifting. For my purposes, I use children's literature as an umbrella term that includes everything from wordless picture board books to novels published in the "young adult" category. I use the term children's literature in a broad and general sense to distinguish a separate field of writing for young people from the rest of the literary fields devoted to "grown-ups". I use "young adult" advisedly because I know that *Holly* and *Homesick* are not shelved as such in the library (they are on the juvenile shelves), and because *A Long Way From Verona* has been severally criticized as a children's book[2] and is now published as general fiction, that is, "adult," but I use "young adult" obstinately because the term commands respect by its very grandiosity, respect which some writing for adolescents has valiantly struggled for and which I feel the three novels I discuss easily deserve.[3]

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[1] Barthes' term for describing the readerly text, a text that moves toward closure. See chapter II.
[2] Notably by Barbara Wall; see chapters II and IV.
[3] In 1981 Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth Donelson took a survey of book categories and found that most of the older terms had developed severe negative connotations. Although "young adult" was the most popular and positive, the survey highlighted the suspicion that rankles among the different professional approaches to children's literature:

> Part of the disagreement comes from the fact that people working with books and young readers have different training and different perspectives. Editors and authors commented that *adolescent literature* has "academic overtones"; English teachers said that *juvenile fiction* was "a publisher's term"; librarians said that "*adolescent literature* is what English teachers (or educators) use for *young adult literature*" One English teacher said she was trying to switch over to *young adult literature* while another one said she hesitated to use this "library term" because she wasn't sure of all the ramifications. (1985, 7)

CHAPTER I
Engaging in first-person narration

> 'I mean, is there a theory of children's literature? I thought it was just books children liked.' ([illegible])

First-person narration can be a deeply engaging way for a narrator to present her story. However, as Susan Sniader Lanser notes in *The Narrative Act*, first-person narration has met with a wide range of critical opinion over time:

> Different conceptions of literature and of the relationship between author and text created still further difficulties in the evaluation of various narrative modes. The controversies over I-narrative are illuminating in this respect. Most nineteenth-century British critics equated the first-person narrator with the biographical author, even in texts like *Jane Eyre* where the I protagonist/narrator has a fictional name and history. Critics who believed that all I-narrative was autobiography considered the use of the I-voice egocentric, self-indulgent, and an inappropriate 'descent' of the author to the level of a character-marionette. Others, like the German theorist Friedrich Spielhagen, understood the I narrator to be a fictional persona, and on that basis lauded I-narrative as best representing the *vox populi* and thereby coming closest to the 'epic unity' of the Homeric narrative. The very same text, in other words, could be condemned as egocentric or praised as the pinnacle of fictional art, according to the particular critic's notion of the relationship between narrating persona and historical author. (22-23)

Critical opinion continues to vary on the evaluation of first-person narration. Many critics maintain that a first-person narrator is either reliable or unreliable. Identifying an unreliable narrator is not always possible nor, I will argue, desirable, particularly in children's and young adult literature where extensive use is made of immediate-engaging-first-person narration.

None of the central texts on narrative theory presents a thorough discussion of first-person narration.[1] While this may seem remarkable considering the prevalence of genres which lend themselves to first-person narration, the problem is not that no theoretical work has been done but rather that the bits that have been done are scattered far and wide. Most works on narrative theory have few, if any, index entries on first-person narration. So far, the work that has been done on narration tends to focus on third-person, while the work on first-person tends to focus on questions concerning a particular genre— the Bildungsroman, autobiography and the Künstlerroman, for instance. Many of these questions focus on subjectivity and on the distance between the narrating I and the narrated I. I am not offering a full fledged theory of first-person narration either, but I do offer a new important bit. I will focus on the closeness between narrator and character, or the privileging of the focalizer over the narrating agent, in what I call immediate-engaging-first-person narration in three young adult novels. Immediate-engaging-first-person narration is used predominantly in writing for youth.

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[1] Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, (1985); Cohan, Steven, and Linda M. Shires. *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction*, (1988); Lanser, Susan Sniader. *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction*. (1981); Martin, Wallace. *Recent Theories of Narrative*, (1986);. Prince, Gerald. *Narratology*, (1982), *Dictionary of Narratology*, (1987); Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, (1983); Wall, Barbara. *The Narrator's Voice: the dilemma of children's fiction*, (1991).

Booth and Genette : the importance of person and focalization.

Both Booth and Genette have made substantial contributions to our understanding of fiction and to our ability to discuss it with the help of precise vocabulary. In his introduction to Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Jonathan Culler remarks that the terms used to discuss fiction

> have been developed in an ad hoc, piecemeal fashion and, paradoxically, though they are supposed to identify all the various elements and possible techniques of the novel, they have not been put together in a systematic way. Even Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. . . is primarily limited to problems of narrative perspective and point of view. (7)

While Genette's *Narrative Discourse* "fills this need for a systematic theory of narrative" (7), it continues the piecemeal trend in its fragmented discussion of first-person narration. Genette's terminology is very technical, a fact which requires one to make the effort of familiarize oneself with it. However, Genette's terminology has the advantage of "avoid[ing] the psychological connotations" (39-40) of more familiar expressions. Accordingly, I will briefly review the terms which are essential to the discussion of the first-person narratives I am examining. This review will also prepare the way for the introduction of a new term, engaging narration, which I believe has considerable potential in shaping a more detailed discussion of first-person narration.

Booth and Genette focus on different aspects of narration. Booth feels that it is more important to establish whether or not the narrator is reliable and whether he is limited or privileged (that is, omniscient to some degree) than whether he is referred to as "I" or "he" (158). Genette feels that more attention needs to be directed to "the problems of narrative enunciating" (26) and to the

> study of relationships: on the one hand the relationship between a discourse and the events that it recounts. . . on the other hand the relationship between the same discourse and the act that produces it, actually. . . or fictively. . . . (27)

In dealing with the kind of first-person narration used in *Booky*, *Homesick*, and *Verona*, Genette's analysis of relationships is more productive than the questions Booth asks,[1] particularly because he does not identify the different kinds of first-person. All three novels I am dealing with are narrated by the narrator-protagonist. The subject of each narrator's narrative is herself at a particular point in time in her immediate past. The characterization of the narrator is substantial because everything she says about herself and others reflects back on her in some way. Reliability is impossible to measure, primarily because of the immediacy of the narration and because of the lack of other voices and information. I deal with this at length in "Irony and reliability" later in this chapter and again, with regard to Jessica's reliability, in chapter IV.

Booth maintains that there are so many possible kinds of first-person narratives that a general discussion of fiction in the first-person is not helpful. As a result, he limits himself to a series of questions which provide a potential beginning point of discussion and leaves first-person narration at that. While I agree that a general discussion of first-person narration is neither advantageous nor even really possible, I do feel that it would be very useful to identify and discuss some specific kinds of first-person narration. Booth assumes a distance between the implied author and the narrator: "For practical criticism probably the most important of these kinds of distance is that between the fallible or unreliable narrator and the implied author who carries the reader with him in judging the narrator" (158). The use of an immediate-engaging-first-person narrator in *Booky*, *Homesick*, and *Verona* means that the implied author's voice is either silent (as in *Verona*) or blended (as in *Booky* and *Homesick*) with the narrator-focalizer's voice where it can be discerned in explanatory statements (about things like the international date line, or cultural or historical details of which knowledge cannot be assumed). A considerable effort has gone into closing the distance between the implied author and the narrator in immediate-engaging-first-person narration, a closing which distinguishes first- from third-person narration. I cannot, therefore, wholly agree with Booth's statement that

> Perhaps the most overworked distinction is that of person. To say that a story is told in the first or the third person will tell us nothing of importance unless we become more precise and describe how the particular qualities of the narrators relate to specific effects. It is true that choice of first person is sometimes unduly limiting; if the "I" has inadequate access to necessary information, the author may be led into improba-

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[1] Booth's series of questions is as follows:

> What kind of first person? How fully characterized? How much aware of himself as a narrator? How reliable? How much confined to realistic inference; how far privileged to go beyond realism? At what point shall he speak truth and at what point utter no judgment or even utter falsehood? These questions can be answered only by reference to the potentialities and necessities of particular works, not by reference to fiction in general, or the novel, or rules about point of view. (165)

> bilities. (150)

Genette's emphasis on the relationship between various narrative elements and his delineation of specific terminology make it possible to describe various narrative effects more precisely. With the help of the concept of focalization in particular, I will demonstrate that, considering the inevitable limitations of first-person narration, it can be an intimately engaging and insightful form *because* the focalizer is restricted. On the one hand, the perspective of an "I" might be considered even more "limiting" in fiction narrated by a youth, but on the other hand, the purpose of first-person narration is to stick to the narrator's, and in this case the youth's, perspective. Because the "improbabilities" of knowledge or information are more visible in first-person narration, it is a more exigent form and, when it is employed skillfully, I suggest that the result is revealing rather than limiting. Immediate-engaging narration has the potential to reveal the character of the narrator-protagonist in a way that emphasizes the immediacy of her subjective experience.

When the narrator is also the focalizer, there is less awareness of limitation because the narrator is not measured against a more experienced self. This is really the crux of engaging narration. In order to clarify this point it is necessary to understand the concept of focalization and the relationships it involves. The "triadic relation formed by the *narrating agent* (who narrates), the *focalizer* (who sees) and the *focalized* (what is being seen and, thus, narrated—in the case of mental life: emotion, cognition, or perception)" (*Telling Stories* 95) is known as *focalization*, a term proposed by Genette to end

> a regrettable confusion between what I call here *mood* and *voice*, a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective*? and the very different question *who is the narrator*?—or, more simply, the question *who sees*? and the question *who speaks*? (186)

When the narrating agent is true, or committed, to the voice of the focalizer in a first-person narrative, then more is revealed about the narrator-protagonist in the story than about the narrator at the time of the narration. In immediate-engaging-first-person narration the narrating agent and the focalizer are the same "person." However, there are two relationships to watch for: one is the proximity between them, or between the narration and the seeing. How much time has elapsed between the seeing and the narration? The second is, whose voice is privileged? The narrating agent's or the character/focalizer's? It is often not possible to pinpoint the narrating agent's voice in immediate-engaging-first-person narration. The typical pattern in first-person genres such as the Bildungsroman, the autobiography and the Künstlerroman is that there has been a significant lapse of time between the seeing and the narrating and that the voice of the narrating agent predominates. While a lengthy lapse of time does not preclude an engaging narrative, I want to propose a distinction between *immediate-engaging* narrative and *distant-engaging* narrative. This distinction is not based on real life or actual fact—it has nothing to do with the author. It is based on the lapse of time built into the narrative itself, that is to say the time between the (narrator's act of) narrating and the narrated (what happened to the character). The second distinction is between *engaging* and *distancing* narration. Engaging narration privileges the focalizer, who sees and speaks in the narrative, and distancing narration privileges the voice of the narrating agent, who sees and comments on the actions of the focalizer from a distance at the time of narration. Another way of saying this is that engaging narration privileges the "subject of discourse (the character who is speaking, thinking, or feeling)," and distancing narration the "agency of discourse (the narrator who conveys that speech, thought or emotion)" (*Telling Stories* 104). For example, *when* Charlotte Brontë writes is not the issue; the issue is at what point does Jane Eyre decide to write her story, and how aware are we of her as a narrator as she relates the story of Jane Eyre the character? *Jane Eyre* is an example of distant-engaging narration because, while it privileges the subject of discourse, the narrating agent is identifiable. Similarly, *when* Jean Fritz writes her autobiography is not foregrounded in *Homesick*. Jean the child is both narrator and focalizer and, because the narration is immediate-engaging-first-person, the positions of focalizer and narrating agent are equivalent. Any information that is the result of actual distance on the part of the author can be attributed to the implied author whose voice blends with the narrator-focalizer in moments where additional information is helpful. However, it is also possible to have a narrative in which the subject and the agency of discourse are difficult to distinguish and there is little evidence of the blended voice of implied author and narrator-focalizer because historical or cultural details are not explained. *Verona* comes closest to this as there is no evidence of a narrator significantly older than her character-self reflecting back on what happened.

In *Telling Stories* Cohan and Shires' description of "character-bound" narration also draws attention to the importance of the lapse in time between when the story takes place and when it is narrated. However, they use three different terms to describe the triad of narrational positions because they are discussing subjectivity rather than focalization, although these are inevitably linked. The terms are roughly equivalent. The relation between the *narrating subject* (narrating agent, narrator), the *subject of narration* (focalizer, character-protagonist) and the *narrated subject* (focalized, story) is especially complex

> in a character-bound (first-person) narration, which obscures the difference between narrating subject and subject of narration. Acting as the narrating subject of the text, its teller, the character who narrates also functions as a subject of narration because he or she is an actor in the story. That this narrating character does mark out two different subject positions initially becomes evident in the temporality of the telling. For the character operates as an actor in one realm of time (story) and as the narrator in another (narration). (109)

In a novel like *Verona*, however, the difference between narrating subject and subject of narration becomes increasingly obscure as the narrative progresses, because the relation between the time of the telling and the time events actually happened is not clearly established and is also much more proximate (days, weeks after) than at the beginning of the narrative where Jessica looks back four years. At this time, narrative theory does not account for the marked closeness between the time in which the story takes place, in which events happen, and the time at which they are narrated. I am calling the manifestation of this temporal closeness immediate-engaging narration: a term grounded in Robyn Warhol's work on the engaging narrator.

Robyn Warhol and the Engaging Narrator

In "Toward a Theory of the Engaging Narrator: Earnest Interventions In Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot" (*PMLA*, 1986), Robyn Warhol examines the techniques used by three mid-nineteenth century women novelists to engage their readers more fully in their texts in the hope of "extend[ing] the referentiality of their fiction, to make it accurately mirror and concretely affect the real world" (817). Warhol argues that:

> inspir[ing] belief in the situations their novels describe—and admittedly hoping to move actual readers to sympathize with real-life slaves, workers, or ordinary middle-class people—these novelists used engaging narrators to encourage actual readers to identify with the "you" in the text. (811)

Generally speaking, narrative interventions have been considered to have a disrupting and therefore a distancing effect.[1] Warhol challenges this premise:

> But not every narrator who intervenes to address a narratee does so to set the actual reader apart from the "you" in the text. Another kind, which I call "engaging" [as opposed to "distancing"], strives to close the gaps between the narratee, the addressee, and the receiver. Using narrative interventions that are almost always spoken in earnest, such a narrator addresses a "you" that is intended to evoke recognition and identification in the person who holds the book and reads, even if the "you" in the text resembles that person only slightly or not at all. (811)

Further,

> The task of the engaging narrator. . . is to evoke sympathy and identification from an actual reader who is unknown to the author and therefore infinitely variable and unpredictable. (812)

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[1] Warhol points out that Gerald Prince assumes the general rule, in his work on the narratee, that there is "a necessary distance between the narratee, the addressee, and the receiver of fictional texts" (811). Warhol concedes that Prince's rule "is certainly correct" for novels with extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators (811).

Warhol concentrates "on the relation between the narratee and the actual reader in engaging narrative" (811), and examines "the differences in strategy between distancing and engaging narrative *interventions*" (811 my emphasis). Warhol's purpose is twofold: first, she feels the "distinction between engaging and distancing narrative situations" will be valuable" to the vocabulary of poetics," and second, it will

> extend the descriptive appreciation of the variety of possible relations between the narratee and the actual reader and promote critical appreciation of novelists who have often been derided for using unusual conventions of "conversation" between narrator and narratee. (812)

Warhol's article is premised on authors who use direct address to "encourage actual readers to see themselves reflected" in the narrative "you." She demonstrates the effectiveness of this strategy by comparing "specific examples of distancing narrative" with "examples of engaging narrative" (812). Overall, according to Warhol, "the engaging narrator's function is ideally to induce tears and at least to stir up sentiment" (817). Warhol questions whether the link between the engaging narrator and "sentimentalism" and "sensationalism" is partially responsible for the omission of engaging technique from narrative theory and whether the omission may be a gender issue. Although I acknowledge the importance of these queries to Warhol's thesis, my purpose here is not to answer them. I will examine how the basic concept of "distancing" and "engaging" narrators can be applied in first-person homodiegetic[1] narration. However, I will examine the narrative and the narration of *engaging narrator-protagonists* rather than narrative *interventions* by *implied authors*. To this end I will, in chapter two, also propose a reworking of Barthes' terms "readerly" and "writerly" to explain the process of engagement and further explore the types and levels of engagement possible in three autodiegetic narratives. The novels I am addressing have their own set of questions, the most notable of which is: "Is immediate-engaging-first-person narration only a feature of children's and young adult literature?", which I will explore in "Irony and reliability" later in this chapter.

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[1] A first-person narrative wherein the narrator is also the main character (*A Dictionary of Narratology* 9).

Implied Author and Reader, Narrator and Narratee

The terms implied author and narrator, and implied reader and narratee designate separate positions within the relationship between text and reader, but these positions are often so close in engaging-first-person narration that they are easily confused. The term "implied reader" designates the theoretical construct of the person who engages in the process of transforming the work into a text;[1] however, it cannot be used alone, with any precision, as a counterpart to the narrator. I will, therefore, briefly consider the origins of the terms implied reader and narratee and consider how they apply in the context of my work. In "Introduction to the study of the Narratee," Gerald Prince has said that the study of the narratee is important and neglected, and he maintains that, "after all, the individual who relates a story and the person to whom the story is told are more or less interdependent in any narration" (315). Seymour Chatman maintains that "only the implied author and implied reader[2] are immanent to a narrative, the narrator and narratee are optional" (151). Gerald Prince's *A Dictionary of Narratology* acknowledges that "though a distinction [between the narratee and the implied reader] can be problematic. . . it is sometimes very clear"(43, 57). The distinction is most difficult to sort out in the case of a maximally covert narratee. An example of a maximally covert narratee is a story that is almost purely dialogue and wherein the narrator is also covert (Prince's example is Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants"). The distinction between narratee and implied reader is easier to determine in the case of a narrative where the narratee is also a character, like Christopher Robin in *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

In the case of the homodiegetic narratives I am discussing, the distinction is not particularly clear. Obviously there is a definite narrator in each of the novels; this implies that there must, therefore, be a narratee. The narratee is not a character, nor is the narratee defined in any way. The distinction between the implied reader and the narratee is vague, in this case, and it becomes tempting to use the terms interchangeably. However, according to Chatman's diagram of the "narrative-communication situation" (151), the progression of communication is distinguished by a series of equivalent pairs, and just as the terms implied author and narrator cannot be used interchangeably it is unwise to do so with their equivalent pairs.

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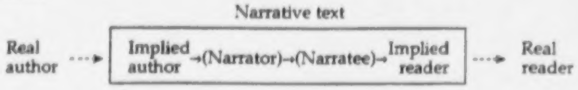
[1] Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" *The Rustle of Language* (56-64). "The work is held in the hand, the text [is held] in language" (57). One could also say that, "text" implies that it is being read, as opposed to the "work-on-the-shelf."

[2] Chatman renames Wayne Booth's "postulated reader" to correspond to Booth's "implied author", as defined in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. In "Distance and Point of View" Booth distinguishes the implied author from "the 'real man'—whatever we may take him to be." The implied author "creates a superior version of himself as he creates his work; any successful novel makes us believe in an 'author' who amounts to a kind of 'second self.' This second self is usually a highly refined and selected version, wiser, more sensitive more perceptive than any real man could be" (*Essentials of the Theory of Fiction* 175). Chatman's implied reader is meant to balance the equation between the real reader and his or her second, or implied, self, the self that results from interacting with the text, and to imply a theoretical equivalency between the positions of flesh and blood author and reader and their manifestation in the text.



Thus, Real Author is to Real Reader as Implied Author is to Implied Reader and as the Narrator is to the Narratee. The flow of communication begins with the Real Author and progresses on to the Implied Author (to Narrator to Narratee) to Implied Reader to Real Reader, with the proviso that "the real author and real reader are outside the narrative transaction as such, though, of course, indispensable to it in the ultimate practical sense" (151). This is to say that we usually limit theoretical and critical discussions to the textual positions of implied author, narrator, narratee and implied reader.

I have been tempted to argue for a collapse of the positions of implied author and narrator, and so of implied reader and narratee, on the basis that the narrators, in the case of the narratives I am discussing, are all author figures and are telling their experiences in writing. *Homesick* provides a case in point. Jean Fritz is the author. Jean Guttery is the narrator. Who is the implied author? Jean is, but as implied author she is an ideal combination of the previously identified Jeans, one who shows fidelity to Jean's childhood experiences yet also incorporates explanatory passages into the narrative. The most obvious of these, the brief essay, "Background of Chinese History, 1913-1927," follows the narrative proper. While it is arguably quite clear that the implied author is responsible for the explanatory information scattered throughout the narrative, that clarity does not preclude the closeness of the implied author and the narrator-focalizer, who are two manifestations of one being. In order to acknowledge these two voices and rather than arguing for a collapse of the positions of implied author and narrator, I call the narrator's voice a blended voice; a blend of the focalizer's and the implied author's voices. I discuss further examples of the narrator's blended voice in chapters II and III. However, an important distinction remains: the implied author is not, by definition, the teller—the narrator is. So is the implied reader not the listener then, by extension? Being an implied reader, according to Wolfgang Iser's definition, in his introduction to *The Implied Reader*, makes it possible to become a narratee, to actualize the telling of the story:

> This term [implied reader] incorporates both the pre-structuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process. It refers to the active nature of this process—which will vary historically from one age to another—and not to a typology of possible readers. (xii)

This process of actualization, then, is what makes an implied reader into a narratee. Yet being an implied reader should also make it possible to resist becoming a narratee. According to Prince the implied reader is "The audience presupposed by a text; a real reader's second self (shaped in accordance with the implied author's values and cultural norms)" (43), whereas the narratee is "The one who is narrated to, as inscribed in the text" and is "a purely textual construct" (57). Being an implied reader does not mean one has to be a narratee. In fact, Chatman argues, the position of narratee can be a site of resistance: "just as the narrator may or may not ally himself with the implied author, the implied reader furnished by the real reader may or may not ally himself with a narratee" (150). This ccan be interpreted in two ways. In the first case, if the narratee is defined by the text as an objectionable character readers are not likely to ally themselves with the narratee. In the second case, if the narratee is not defined, readers may not ally themselves with the narratee because they refuse to accept the values and cultural norms inscribed in the text.

In first-person narration, the narrator and narratee are obviously not optional. In order to engage with the narrating I the implied reader must first be willing to become the narratee, to be the listener. In implied address the narrator directs her narrative at no one in particular, or at a general audience; the telling is the primary concern. In such a case, when the implied reader allies herself thoroughly with the narratee, she is the "ideal" listener and has the illusion of participating in the story on some level. Being an ideal listener is a relatively passive process of engagement when implied address is used, whereas direct address creates a more active awareness of the process of engagement.

The way the narrator tells her story and what she tells are of crucial concern in an immediate-engaging-first-person narration because there is no other source of information: implied author, narrator and character, or narrating agent, focalizer and focalized, are practically fused. It is not only the story itself that engages us; in the process of actualizing the text's potential we become intimately engaged in its presentation, its narration, and because of its immediacy there are times when we feel we are listening to a story we are involved in. These are moments of "full narrative engagement," which result from the intimacy between the narrator and the narratee. The opposite extreme, "narrative dis-engagement," occurs when the reader refuses, or resists, the position of narratee. The level of the reader's engagement depends in part on the narrator's voice.

Genette uses "voice" rather than Booth's "person" in order to extend the concept of the narrator, the person whose voice tells the story, and to avoid psychological connotations. In Genette's usage, "voice, since it deals with narrating, will refer to a relation with the subject (and more generally with the instance) of the enunciating." He also states that his use of the term is not based "on rigorous homologies" (31-32). I use voice here to suggest both an aspect of character and a quality of the expression of events. First-person narration, like the dramatic monologue, depends a great deal on how something is said. Because the "how" tells us something about both the narrator and the character, which is particularly relevant in immediate-engaging-narration, voice is an important aspect of first-person narration. In an homodiegetic narrative the subject of the story is the narrator and as she is both the subject of narration and the narrating subject, her voice will determine whether or not the reader finds her merely self-indulgent and egocentric or honestly interesting and engaging or something in between these extreme options.

Toward a theory of immediate-engaging-first-person narration

I fully support Warhol's point that the term "engaging" would be extremely useful to narrative poetics. I am surprised, however, that as the initiator of the term she does not take the opportunity to justify or explain her choice. To engage, to be engaged, to become engaged, all suggest different levels of involvement with something. Engagement suggests at least one of, or some combination of, the following: interest, agreement, commitment, willingness. The idea of "being" or "becoming" is important here as well because it underlies what the process of engagement can mean as part of the act of reading: when one is "engaged by" a narrative one is involved in some form of identification which can lead one, temporarily, to adopt, or take on, another persona. To be "engaged with" a narrative suggests interest, to be "engaged in" suggests involvement, and to be 'engaged to' suggests commitment. In some instances an engagement is, after all, effectively a contract.

First-person narration seeks to draw the reader in and establish confidence between the narrator and the narratee. Engagement is a (trial) promise to long-term commitment made by both parties. Thus, an engaging text stays with the reader as experience gained. An engaging narrative is, in a sense, premised on a mutual "embrace" between narrator and narratee—there is a willing, and pleasurable, intimacy.[1] That is to say, the narratee does not remain external to the narrated events, but rather agrees to join in a mutual embrace with the narrator, thereby accepting the fully sympathetic part of the ideal listener. This drawing in of the narratee, as if he were the listener *in* the story rather than a reader *outside* the story, means that in the process of reading, the narrated events are, to some degree, actualized. Aidan Chambers identifies this as the process of becoming an *implicated reader*. An implicated reader is

> one so intellectually and emotionally given to the book, not just its plot and character but its negotiation between author and reader of potential meanings, that the reader is totally involved. The last thing he wants is to stop reading; and what he wants above all is to milk the book dry of all it has to offer, and to do so in the kind of way the author wishes. He finally becomes a participant in the making of the book. He has become aware of the 'tell-tale gaps.' (*Booktalk* 46)

The reader, whether she is critical of the narrator or not, has no control over the outcome of the narrative; once she has submitted to it (fully engaged in it), she is at its mercy. In *A Long Way From Verona*, for example, it doesn't matter what the reader thinks of Jessica for going down into the sea wood without permission.

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[1] The metaphor of "embrace" as a kind of narrative engagement is taken up by Roderick McGillis in "The embrace: Narrative voice and children's books" (*CCL* 63). I discuss his article below in the section headed "Irony and reliability."

The fact is, she does. After Jessica's encounter with the Italian prisoner, the narratee (the listener *in* the story) feels that she is also walking away from him. By empathizing with Jessica's anxiety and elation, the reader actualizes the narrative not only for Jessica but for herself. On one level this actualization is the basic process by which a work becomes a text, while on another it illustrates, in a theoretical extreme, the process of fusion between narrator and narratee that might occur as a result of full narrative engagement. In an absolute theoretical sense, full narrative engagement could result in the collapse of the positions of narrator and narratee. However, in practical terms a reader's full engagement can range from complete empathy with the narrator, wherein he is aware of being a reader outside the story as well as being a listener in the story, to such fully absorbed empathy with the narrator in the story that he forgets about also being a reader outside the story until either some demand from the outside world breaks the spell or some detail in the story breaks the level of engagement. Such thorough engagement is rare and difficult to sustain, but it is possible.

Robyn Warhol has identified five strategies used by engaging (intervening) narrators to draw their readers into the plight of a story's characters and to cause them to draw parallels between the story and the "real" world. I will compare the use of (1) address (the use of names, of implied and of direct address); (2) frequency of address; (3) irony; (4) metalepsis; and (5) emphasis (of fiction vs. lived experience) in Warhol's work on the engaging (intervening) narrator to their use in immediate-engaging-first-person narration.

(1). Address: use of names, of implied and of direct address.

The first strategy for engaging the implied reader, to enable her to become a narratee, is the form of address to the narratee. Warhol states that the intervening narrator "[w]ill usually either avoid naming the narratee or use names that refer to large classes of potential actual readers "(813). She points to examples like "reader," "Farmers," "Mothers." While the narratee can be named and characterized in first-person narration, this does not happen in the three novels I have chosen. The narratee is directly addressed in *Verona* as "you." The relationship between I-the-narrator and you-the-narratee is established in the very first sentence of the narrative. In *Booky* and *Homesick,* the narratee is inferred but not directly addressed. The narrator uses implied address, which does not identify potential actual readers in any way.

There are lengthy passages in *Verona* in which Jessica does not address you-the-narratee. These passages can be considered to use implied address, which is periodically interrupted by the use of direct address. However, as direct address is established immediately and is used at intervals throughout the narrative, I prefer to say that *Verona* uses direct address only, rather than both types of address, with the understanding that, as in a conversation between two people, particularly in the case where one person is doing all the talking, the speaker's direct address to the listener will occur periodically rather than continuously. The passages where the "you" is not addressed allow the narratee to engage with the narrator's story more intimately because his role as listener is not foregrounded.

(2). Frequency of address.

In first-person narratives in which the address is implied, the narratee is being addressed continuously but not overtly. In narration that uses direct address, covert address is punctuated by moments of overt, or direct, address. The degree of directness can be measured by the frequency of address. The intervening narrator, rather than referring "to 'the Reader' or 'my reader,' very much like an evangelical preacher, more frequently speaks to 'you' (813). The use of 'you' in Gardam's text is unlike the 'you' of the evangelical preacher, however, because of the sense of a private one-on-one relationship between narrator and narratee. In effect, the intervening engaging narrator is the narrative manifestation, via the implied author, of the real author desiring communication with the real reader. In theory, the communication engendered in the process of engagement between the narrator and the narratee can be presumed to channel communication between the implied author and the implied reader and thus between the real author and the real reader. Although the communication does not necessarily progress in this manner, it is one of the possible outcomes.

Further questions arise from Warhol's point. How frequently does the narrator intervene? If it is only on occasion, then who tells the story the rest of the time? Is the intervention made by the same voice as the one responsible for the narration? If the voices are different does one belong to the implied author and the other to the narrator? Presumably, this designation of voices is one possibility. Or there might be more than one narrator, as in Aidan Chambers' *Dance On My Grave* or Paul Zindel's *The Pigman*. Another consideration is that the narrator might be shifting from implied to direct address and that this shift is considered an intervention.

(3). Irony.

Irony is a staple element of distancing narration. Intervening engaging narrators, on the other hand,

> usually assume that their narratees are in perfect sympathy with them [rather than ironically inscribing the addressee as a potentially "bad reader"]. . . . [and] tend to inscribe their narratees through overjustifying their assertions. . . [in order] to convert the narratees to their own point of view" (813).

In immediate-engaging narration, however, overjustification does not stand out as a strategy. The narrator-protagonist usually assumes a sympathetic narratee and therefore does not need to convert the narratee to his point of view. All three narratives I discuss assume a sympathetic reader. Because the narratives are in the first person, the entire narrative is devoted to converting the narratee to the narrator's point of view. Fritz and Hunter do not assume "bad readers" but they do recognize that young readers will need certain historically specific details explained. It is in explanatory statements that an experienced reader can discern the adult voice, or implied author, blended with the voice of the child narrator. An attempt has been made to integrate the implied author's voice so as not to disrupt the narrative voice; furthermore, that adult voice is not an ironic voice. I suggest that another difference in immediate-engaging-first-person narration is the use of irony in the telling: if there is any irony present it is limited to accessible verbal (or visual in the case of picture books) irony. There is no use of dramatic, romantic or structural irony to mark a significant time span between the *then* of the story and the *now* of the telling.

(4). Metalepsis.

Warhol identifies "The narrator's stance toward the characters" (814) as an important strategy for linking fiction and reality:

> An engaging narrator. . . uses what Genette has called "metalepsis" (crossing diegetic levels to imply that figures inside and outside the fiction exist on the same plane [which he considers to have a distancing effect]). . . to suggest that the characters are possibly as "real" as the narrator and narratee, who are, in these cases, to be identified with the actual author and actual reader. (814)

Metalepsis is very powerful in a first-person narrative, especially when there are additional materials surrounding the text to suggest that the figures inside the text correspond to those outside. In Fritz's text such a suggestion is built into her very title ("My Own Story") as well as provided by the "Foreword" and the photographs at the back, and the fact that the narrator-protagonist is called Jean.[1] Hunter's text also includes what appear to be family photographs, and, although the narrator's name is not the author's, they are strikingly similar: Beatrice Thompson narrates, Bernice Thurman authors. Furthermore, both Fritz and Hunter dedicate their book to their mothers and fathers. Jane Gardam's text, by contrast, is not dedicated and contains no illustrations or photographs. It is clear from Gardam's "A Writer's Landscape" that she has transposed a number of her lived experiences into Jessica's narrative, but her approach is markedly different from Fritz's and Hunter's. However, this does not make Jessica seem any less "real." As I will demonstrate in chapter II, metalepsis has a powerful engaging effect in first-person narration.

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[1] The title, *Jane Eyre: an autobiography*, also plays on the idea of metalepsis. However, the idea is not borne out by the requirements of the autobiographical pact (see chapter III) as neither the author's pseudonym nor her real name corresponds to the narrator-protagonist's.

(5). Emphasis: fiction vs. personal history.

A narrator can emphasize her story's fictionality or she can emphasize her characters' personal history to the point that the reader is apt to forget that the story is fiction. Of course, a narrator can also combine these two extremes or dispense with them entirely. "The narrator's implicit or explicit attitude toward the act of narration" (815) can help to determine the implied reader's level of engagement in the narrative:

> Like any intervening narrator, the engaging narrator, too, intrudes into the fiction with reminders that the novel is "only a story." In doing so, however, engaging narrators differ from distancing narrators in that their purposes are seldom playful: they intrude to remind their narratees—who, in their texts, should stand for actual readers—that the fictions reflect real-world conditions for which readers should take active responsibility after putting aside the book. . . . If the narratees can feel for the characters, then the actual readers the narratees represent should be able to feel for the actual persons the characters represent. . . . If empathy with the characters helps develop the actual reader's capacity for sympathy, so much the better, but reading the novel is to be only an exercise for strengthening that capacity in the reader's own life. Every engaging address to "you" simultaneously reminds the narratee (and the actual reader) that the story is only a fiction and encourages the reader to apply to nonfictional, real life the feelings the fiction may have inspired. (815-16)

There are no reminders in any of the three first-person narratives being considered that it is "only a story." Their emphasis is on the story as "my story" or "the story of my life." The similarity in Beatrice's and Bernice's names, for instance, leads me to assume that they have too much in common for Beatrice's story not to be true on some level. The emphasis, then, is not on "fiction" but on "personal history." And, because the narratives are set back in a particular historical context, there is no opportunity for the reader to take active responsibility for the events described. That is to say, the real-world conditions reflected in the narratives are past and there is no way to alter them. There is, however, ample opportunity for comparison between now, or the present in which the reader reads, and then, or the past reflected in the narrative, and for contemplating the notion of "progress" between now and then (and for taking active responsibility for how things stand now).

Irony and reliability

Roderick McGillis takes up Warhol's thesis and applies the idea of an engaging narrator—a narrator in whom the narratee is interested, is committed to and in agreement with—and applies it to children's fiction. His point is that the narrative voice in children's fiction seeks to "embrace" its readers. McGillis maintains "that children's narratives do not differ from narratives for adults in technique, but that the voice that speaks from a children's book seeks to draw the child reader in by gaining her trust, by embracing her" (24), and further, that a voice "which embraces the reader is a distinguishing feature of literature for young readers" (25). McGillis describes the difference between children's and adult narratives as follows:

> If anything differentiates narratives for adults from those of children, then I suggest this difference resides in aspects of the telling: tone or mood. The narrative voice, whether that be the voice of the narrator or the voice of an implied author behind the narrator, will embrace us in a children's book. This does not mean that such books cannot be complex in theme or structure or image, only that the voice that tells us the story is warm and reliable. And by reliable, I mean reliable in the sense that we trust the narrator not consciously to lead us astray. (38)

I agree with McGillis that the difference between children's and adult narratives "resides in aspects of the telling", although I would add vision, that is, the person who sees, the focalizer, to tone, mood and voice as one of the aspects of telling. Further, young adult literature extends the range of ways in which a story can be told from those that work for younger children to those that are more appropriately adult. The focalizer is very important in first-person children's and young adult narratives. The focalizer's powers of perception are what differentiate between a narrator like Booky or Jean and one like Jessica. While they all strive to be warm and reliable, the reader's engagement with them is different because the voice of the implied author is not so obviously blended with Jessica's, and because her sophisticated use of language and direct address results in active rather than passive engagement. Yet, while I understand the sentiment behind McGillis' description of the narrator's voice as warm and reliable, I am uncomfortable with it.

"Reliable" suggests Booth's discussion of reliable and unreliable narrators and I think it is time to reconsider the voice, and character, of the narrator especially in children's and young adult immediate-engaging-first-person narration, which has veritably exploded since the advent of Holden Caulfield's narration in *Catcher in the Rye*. As I stated in the introduction,
Lois Kuznets notes that "first-person narration has been the most striking development in realistic fiction for young people" (190), but she feels that "first-person point of view as it appears in children's and young adult literature can seem severely limited" (189). Kuznets appears to agree with Henry James that irony is the most satisfying aspect of first-person narration. The result of dispensing with any kind of mediation is the narrator-protagonist's "narrowness of vision" (189) which

> seems particularly evident in first-person fiction for young adults and children when the author seems unable to

> incorporate in the text any measures of the narrator's reliability. The child reader is then never forced to question identification with this character. (189)

Immediate-engaging-first-person narration makes it very difficult for the author to incorporate any measure of the narrator's reliability in the text. But immediate-engaging narration is only one of three types of first-person narration (and these three types do not properly account for variations, they assume the narrator is telling his own story), and is important for the very reason that such measures are not built into the text. Child readers are not prevented from questioning any identification they might feel; they just aren't forced into it by the text. The crux of the issue, then, is purely a matter of trust. While distant engaging and distancing narration usually ascertain whether the reader's trust in the narrator was well-founded or misguided, immediate-engaging narration usually does not reveal the soundness of the reader's judgement. Reliability, then, is an important issue in distancing narration where the narrating agent's relation to the subject of narration is more likely to be described by dramatic and structural irony. Unreliability, to some extent, is a feature of dramatic and structural irony which is not an element in immediate-engaging narration because the focalizer is the narrator and not the narrating agent. The subject of narration is the one whose voice and vision direct the narration. In distant-engaging narration the adult voice of the narrating agent can interject to identify or clarify the focalizer's unreliability. The narrator's "limitations" in immediate-engaging narration can be compensated for by her fictional edge of clarity, which, as I argue in chapter III, is an accepted literary convention in the reconstruction of the child narrator and can, on the basis of the built in limitations, be similarly extended to any narrators of an immediate-engaging narration, whether they are child or adult, because the "limitations" are the same.

The difficulty for some critics, like Lois Kuznets and Perry Nodelman, seems to be that their expectations have been so entrenched in the Jamesian disdain for the limitations of first-person narration that they have difficulty accepting "uncritical" narrators. Two of my favorite first-person narrators, Jessica Vye and Virginia Hamilton's Arilla Sun Down (of the book by the same name), have been pegged as unreliable, by Barbara Wall and Nina Mikkelsen respectively, an assessment with which I cannot agree even though I can understand how each critic arrived at that assessment. I cannot agree because I do not agree with Lois Kuznets that unquestioning identification with the narrator-protagonist is absolutely naïve. Kuznets states:

> For those who, as I do, consider unquestioning identification with the protagonist to be not only naive but a type of reading to be gradually shed as one matures, first-person point of view as it appears in children's and young adult literature can seem severely limited. This limitation can, of course, sometimes be overcome by very skillful writers who manage to incorporate measures of the narrator's reliability in the text. (189)

In psychological terms, identification is "a process by which a person ascribes to himself the qualities or characteristics of another person" (*Random House Dictionary*). I'm assuming that Kuznets means two things by "unquestioning identification": 1) full empathy with the narrator and 2) an identification that is unaware of dramatic and/or structural irony (which is not, however, a factor in immediate-engaging-first-person narration). Kuznets' point, then, is that unless the author finds a way around the limits of first-person voice and focus, the narration itself is limited because there is no way of knowing whether the narrator is reliable or not. Kuznets' measure of a successful negotiation of those limits is exemplified by E. Nesbit's Bastable stories wherein

> one of the charms. . . is the manner in which Oswald is forced to convey the ways he himself is obtuse and self-serving in the very process of pretending to be alert and modest. His exaggerated sense of his own importance and superiority to girls and poets is checked by the events and the eloquence of others that he duly records. (189)

While I agree that immediate-engaging-first-person narration has its limitations, they are precisely what I find interesting about it. Henry James is disparaging about the first person because the author must "reckon with [the reader]. . . so loosely and vaguely" and, worse still, must subject the reader to "the terrible *fluidity* of self-revelation" (321). The fact is that immediate-engaging-first-person narration is unlikely to be truly "reliable" because it is based solely on one character's point of view and is expressed so soon after the fact that it is, therefore, both biased and incomplete.

In *The Pleasure of Children's Literature* (second edition), Perry Nodelman maintains that one of the pleasures of reading first-person narration is the reader's ability to see around, or through, the narrator. More experienced readers come to expect clues and hints, provided by distant-engaging and distancing narration, that put them a step above the narrator. As a result of this expectation, Nodelman argues, adults find it hard to cope with a text like Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* because the narrator fills the entire frame and there is no way to see around her (60).

> Someone who reads *Are You There God?* with knowledge of the strategies required to read more *sophisticated fictions* may well see Margaret as a self-pitying and self-indulgent brat, and believe that Blume has managed to create a "self-portrait" of a typical teenager that cleverly reveals the limited vision of adolescents. (60 my emphasis)

Immediate-engaging-first-person narratives are not unsophisticated by definition, as Nodelman's point might lead one to believe. Consider Kevin Major's *Hold Fast* and Brian Doyle's *Angel Square* by comparison. Neither Michael nor Tommy are teenage brats with unduly limited vision. Blume's problem novels fit Mari Pritchard's and Humphrey Carpenter's description of would-be

Holden Caulfield imitators (*Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* 518-19);[1] that is to say that Blume's use of immediate-engaging narration is comparatively unsuccessful due to the quality of the writing. Personally, I have no trouble with *Hold Fast* or *Angel Square* or many other examples of immediate-engaging-first-person narration.[2] I do, however, have trouble with Judy Blume. I think that Blume is popular because the issues she writes about are of interest to her projected readership. The narration, though immediate, is shallow and unchallenging and therefore the problem is the reader's narrative engagement rather than the type of narration. Furthermore, the "limited vision of adolescents" is nowhere near as limited as a Blume narrative might suggest. I will return to this vision in the final section of chapter IV, "the adolescent novel of ideas." In this regard I find the popularity of novels, like Blume's, in the first person has done a great disservice to young adult literature because the distinction between "popular" and "good" literature is often confused. As Donelson and Nilsen point out, "It's important that evaluators make clear their primary emphasis lest readers misunderstand them. For example, a critic may review a book positively because of its literary quality, but a reader will interpret the positive review of it as a prediction of popularity", buy the book and then feel annoyed when it sits on the shelf unread for long periods of time (341). The economic reality of the book trade means that "popular" books, only some of which are of a high literary quality, frequently overshadow the implicit meaning of a "good" or "successful" book. However, there is always bound to be a range of quality among books. I would suggest that a marker of the quality of an immediate-engaging first-person narrative is that a reader can return to it time and time again and, despite increasing maturity, find it pleasurable and fully engaging. My suspicion is that Blume's narratives will not stand the test of time; even though they might be fully engaging to a ten year old, that same reader will not engage with them at the same level as she grows older and becomes a more demanding, or discriminating, reader.

If adults have a problem with immediate-engaging-first-person narration in young adult literature it may be because of the particular young adult literature they have selected, in which case they might consider some of the more "literary" options, or because of the relative absence of immediate-engaging-first-person narration in "adult" literature. The novels that are both immediate-enagagingfirst-person narration and for adults raise the spectre of publishing categories. The question of whether a novel is "for adults" or "for children" becomes especially inscrutable in the young adult category when the narrators are in their late teens, or fall into what has been termed "for older readers" in Australia. In "New Voices in Young Adult Fiction", Russ MacMath notes that Australia "has pushed the definition of young adult to college-aged students. The emphasis there is more on the "adult" than the "young" (13) and he describes "Australia's Sonya Hartnett['s]" writing as "explicitly for the post-adolescent, 'over the age of consent' market" (17). The dividing line at either end of the young adult spectrum is difficult to draw. When do "older readers" become adults? And when do children become "young adults"? And are all twelve year olds clearly in one category, or does it depend on the individual? These are questions which are not easily answered and are probably more useful if they are left open to discussion rather than answered definitively. I will return to these questions in chapter IV with regard to *A Long Way From Verona*.

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[1] Part of the entry reads:

> Novels in this genre [American teenage novels, like Paul Zindel's, influenced by Salinger] rarely have much to distinguish them from each other; there is an almost uniform shrillness of tone and predictability of character development. More subtle studies of adolescence have been produced by. . . Paula Fox. . . Vera and Bill Cleaver. . . and Robert Cormier, who presents a view of teenage life which is harsher, more luridly dramatic, but at the same time more convincing than that of the Salinger imitators. (519)

[2] For example, novels by Virginia Hamilton, Kevin Major, Gary Crew, Melina Marchetta, Jean Fritz, Jane Gardam, Aidan Chambers, Bernice Thurman Hunter and Brian Doyle to name but a few.

So far, I have encountered very few novel length adult narratives that use immediate-engaging-first-person narration. The main exceptions are the diary form (*Touch the Dragon*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*), the epistolary novel (*Pamela*, *The Queen of the Tambourine*), the short story ("Boys and Girls") and narratives depicting madness/insanity in a way that does not signal a shift in time (Janet Frame, *Faces in the Water*). Three examples of immediate-engaging-first-person narration "for adults" are J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*. Although *The Bell Jar* and *Lucy* were published for adults there is nothing that sets them apart in kind from Melina Marchetta's *Looking for Alibrandi* (Josephine is 17) or Jane Gardam's *Bilgewater* (Marigold is 18), for example. The very point of these narratives is that by an "unquestioning identification" with the narrator the reader gets a fuller, or experiential, sense of the narrator's experience than would be possible in a distancing narration. Readers must determine how involved they are going to be rather than having excuses and explanations provided by the narrating agent. That is to say, readers are free to question their identification but the text provides no answers.

A summary of types and levels of engagement

The five strategies Warhol outlines demonstrate the differences between an engaging intervening narrator and an engaging first-person narrator. Thus, an overview of the terms for narrative engagement that I have begun to outline can be broken down into two main categories: types and levels of engagement. I have presented *Booky*, *Homesick* and *Verona* as examples of *immediate-engaging narration*, which is meant to suggest that the implied reader feels that he is part of the narrative action and emotion because of the immediacy between the narrating and the narrated, and stands in contrast to *distant-engaging narration*, where there is a significant lapse of time between the narrating and the narrated and *distancing narration*, where the implied reader feels like an onlooker and just watches events unfold without becoming particularly involved. James Joyce's

"Araby" is an example of distancing-first-person narration. The narrator recounts a childhood (in the broad sense) experience without drawing the narratee in because his voice and tone are distant and ironic. Even though the story is about disappointment and disillusionment, the implied reader does not fully participate in the emotional experience because the narrating I and the narrated I are separated by a clear gulf of time and experience in which the knowledge and vision of the agent of narration, or narrating I, is privileged.

Both immediate- and distant-engaging narratives can be either *active* or *passive*. *Verona*, for example, is *active-immediate-engaging* narration while *Booky* and *Homesick* are *passive-immediate-engaging* narration. Active narration refers to the use of direct address; the implied reader is repeatedly reminded of his role as reader/listener/narratee. In other words, the narrator is overtly addressing a particular audience even though that audience may not be specifically named. Passive narration, on the other hand, refers to the use of implied address, which is continuous because it is covert, where identification with the I-voice is not interrupted and where it is possible not to have to work at, or be actively engaged in, identifying with the I unless one's interest wanes because of a low level of engagement.

When the reader actively resists becoming the narratee or the implied reader in a narrative using implied address because she does not, or can not, identify with that position, then she is actively, rather than passively, engaged. In this case, the type of engagement is imposed by the individual reader rather than by the narrative itself. Otherwise the types of engagement can be determined by narrative elements in the text. The terms active- and passive-engagement are a further distinction between types of engagement. Levels of engagement, on the other hand, depend on the reader. For example, if the reader is actively engaged in a passive narration, then chances are that his level of engagement is so low that he is practically "dis-engaged," or in the state of refusing to be the implied reader.

I propose three ranges of levels of engagement that can be applied to both types of engagement: Full, Partial, and Occasional to Non-engagement. For the most part these categories are self-evident. Partial means that one is engaged about half the time; it is the "fence-sitter's" category. Occasional means that the narrative has only a few moments of engagement to offer rather than a continuous or partial engaging experience. Non-engagement is the passive description and simply suggests a complete lack of interest. When the lack of interest is active, due to a resistant reading caused by repulsion, refusal or rejection, all of which amount to a kind of negative interest, then this active disinterest is Dis-engagement.

Another way of couching the distinctions between these three levels is to equate them with the difference in being engaged with, in and to a narrative. To be engaged with suggests a level of engagement ranging from active disinterest to slight or mild interest or Dis/Non-engagement. To be engaged in suggests an intermittent, partial or moderate level of engagement. To be engaged to suggests a constant commitment, or Full engagement. Although these levels of engagement are not meant to be evaluative, it seems logical that a reader would consider a book she was fully engaged in better than one that left her non-engaged.

A theory of narrative engagement can operate on two planes. It can both explain how the narrative itself is constructed and help individual readers to explain their own response to it in more precise terms. Aidan Chambers points out that "It is psychologically impossible to read something without experiencing a response. We may fall asleep from boredom; but that is a response" (*Booktalk* 11). It is useful to have terms to help us articulate why we were, or how we came to be, riveted or bored, or something in between.

Two other terms that can help us to understand, and talk about, what happens when we become engaged in a text are Roland Barthes' "readerly" and "writerly." These terms have more to do with a reading strategy, or practice, than with the individual texts; however, some texts fit one category more comfortably than another, while others could fit either one. These terms underlie the difference between product and production, between a finished (or closed) work and a work in process (one that opens possibilities). These distinctions are at the root of the concept of postmodernism. The concept of readerly and writerly has been widely disseminated and is referred to in scholarship ranging from literary and film studies to hypermedia and semipopular scientific texts. I am applying Barthes' terms to the idea of narrative engagement in order to elaborate on two distinct forms of engagement: *readerly engagement*, in which the narrative world is a product complete unto itself even though it is grounded in "reality," and *writerly engagement,* in which the narrative world and the "real" world overlap as a result of metalepsis, and which therefore results in an ongoing process of weighing one world against the other.

Readerly and Writerly texts, or, of peaches and onions.

Roland Barthes differentiates between two kinds of texts as well as two kinds of reading processes, both of which are accorded the same names. A text may be readerly or writerly and each may be read in a readerly or a writerly fashion. A readerly text is a "classic narrative;" it adheres to Aristotle's poetics of plot, and is therefore considered a completed "product," whereas a writerly text consists of a series of narrative segments which need to be brought together, or made sense of, by the reader in a "production." The reader of a readerly text is a "consumer" whereas the reader of a writerly text is a "producer." In other words, the readerly text is considered a finite or closed object that contains meaning awaiting to be consumed, while the writerly text is infinite or open and requires the participation of the reader to produce meaning. The complete open-ended nature of the writerly text, which is thoroughly plural and does not value one meaning above others, presents a practical problem. As George Wasserman puts it,

> . . . Barthes regards the writerly as the (unattainable) goal of what he calls "modern writing". . . [and] the critic can do little

> [with it because]. . . . the more plural a work is, the less capable one is of finishing it; since it is indeterminable, one is always "rereading" it. (81-2)

Michael Moriarty further explains the problem:

> The ideal plural text would exorcize the twin demons of exteriority and totality. That is, firstly, it would be cut off from any foundation in a world outside it, would be constrained by no imperative of representation; but equally it would combine multiple networks of meaning, many points of access, of which none would have any priority over the others, so that meaning would be ultimately undecidable. There would be no central principle organizing the text into a whole; no *structure*. . . (119)

Texts can, however, be read in a writerly fashion. In effect, Barthes is arguing for a model of writerly reading in which all texts are approached as plural multilayered objects like onions, or productions rather than products.

Barthes' analogy of the text as an onion rather than as a fruit with a kernel illustrates the difference between readerly and writerly texts:

> if up until now we have looked at the text as a species of fruit with a kernel (an apricot, for example), the flesh being the form and the pit being the content, it would be better to see it as an onion, a construction of layers (or levels, or systems) whose body contains, finally, no heart, no kernel, no secret, no irreducible principle, nothing except the infinity of its own surfaces. ("Style and its Image" 10)

This analogy highlights the reader's role as either the consumer or the producer of a text. The consumer-reader is conditioned to approach texts as though they were ripe, kerneled fruit waiting to be eaten. If the text is like an onion, consisting of layer upon layer of meaning, will the reader approach it in the same way? Faced with an onion rather than a peach, the reader may well ask, "How many people bite into an onion as they would into a peach?"[1]

A ripe peach, like a promising novel, a readerly text, invites us to bite into it for the sheer pleasure of consumption. A large onion, like the writerly text, asks to be sliced open and have its many layers contemplated; where the process of contemplation, or participation in the production of the text, is part of the pleasure. A large onion is less likely be consumed whole like a peach; this fact does not, however, imply that its diced bits or slivered rings cannot be enjoyed. What the analogy of consuming a peach versus an onion makes evident is that one's expectations of and approach to a text are critical issues.

Layering and abundant signification are all-important in a writerly text. Multiplicity and signifying flux replace consistency and stable meaning. The writerly text is based on a slightly shakier foundation and undermines the premise of the readerly text's solid structure. The difference between a readerly

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[1] I use peach rather than apricot out of personal preference.

and a writerly text can lie in one's reading practice, in the expectations one brings to the text and in the manner in which one approaches its reading. One's engagement in the text also affects one's reading practice to some extent. A writerly text can frustrate the consumer-reader. If he is willing to tackle the onion text he becomes a participant in the production of meaning; he is now a reader-producer rather than a product-consumer. The reader-producer examines the very construction of the text, seeking not only to understand how each of the segments functions within the text, but how they suggest connections outside the text. The fragmentation of the text prevents the reader-producer from being swept along as easily by the flow of the story as when she consumes the peach text. Even a readerly text can be read as a writerly text by seeking new ways to look at it, by opening the whole and considering the relation of its parts, by breaking one's straight-line and single-minded consumptive habit; one must take the time not only to chew each morsel a good thirty-six times, but also to ruminate or, quite literally re-chew or re-read.

In one sense the idea of readerly and writerly engagement is an extension of the idea of readerly and writerly reading, yet how one reads suggests that one has some kind of choice, whereas how one is engaged suggests more about how the text works on the reader. One can have some control over one's engagement once one recognizes how the text is working on one as a reader and once one recognizes the significance of one's own response to the text.

Kaja Silverman's discussion of Barthes' work identifies a number of key points regarding readerly and writerly texts. The classic, or readerly, text "strives above all for homogeneity" (243) and, while it uses paradox and antithesis, it avoids contradiction. Contradiction is not conducive to closure. The classic text also "depends upon a linear reading" (245), a temporal forward movement and a gathering of loose ends into a formidable and conclusive final knot. Barthes' premise is that most readerly texts are to be treated like any other commercial product in an industrial capitalist society; they are "a disposable product, designed to be consumed during one encounter" (245). Repeated consumption of the same text is "tolerated only in certain marginal categories of readers (children, old people, and professors)" (quoted in Silverman 246). The underlying premise is that once a reader has been lured through to the conclusion of a particular narrative the desire will not be to repeat the exact same experience but rather to move on to a new, if similar, one.[1] This premise denies the pleasure and value of repetition and recognition to the average reader.[1] A text is, after all, not a literal fruit but a metaphorical one and so it can be consumed repeatedly as either peach, onion or some combination of both. Wasserman calls *S/Z* "an essay of criticism-by-rereading" (74). He explains the point of Barthes' idea as follows:

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[1] The idea of the book as a product to be consumed and forgotten draws this remark from Gardam's Eliza:

> . . . I couldn't possibly write books. There are far too many already. Why should I spend hours all by myself in a room writing books just to amuse some people I've never met for a few hours on an aeroplane before they get pulped? I mean the books get pulped. They have a shelf-life of six weeks most of them and a good thing, too. They're like package puddings. . . ."
> (*The Queen of the Tambourine* 83)

> Rereading does not help us to further understand the text, to master it by reaching "some ultimate signified" or meaning; it does just the reverse, multiplying the signifiers so that the text disseminates a plurality of meanings which makes the closure of it more and more difficult. (80)

Readerly and Writerly Engagement

The analogy of eating, or consuming, a peach or an onion can be extended to underline the differences in readerly or writerly engagement in a text. Although the readerly text, like the peach, might be extremely juicy, and verily dripping its contents once it has been bitten into, the pleasure of the text is the act of consuming a coherent entity. From the first delicious bite the readerly text lures us onward and, though the narrative may be structured in all sorts of tantalizing, distracting and devious ways, the reader's ultimate pleasure comes from recuperating the overall linear progression of the narrative and its development of character. Readerly engagement in a text is driven by the reader's desire for coherence, unity and understanding. The reader's desire is fed, in part, by the text. Ultimately, the reader achieves understanding in conjunction with the text.

Unlike the peach, the large, round onion is apt to fall to pieces when it has been cut. Once it is opened, the onion, or writerly text, frustrates the reader's desire for coherence and its powerful aroma overwhelmes the senses, often to the point of causing tears to flow. The onion requires more thought. Further, because the onion's peel is also a series of layers one has to decide how many, if any, ought to be peeled off before cutting it, or in the case of a writerly text one has to decide where the covers stop and the text begins. Like the peach, the onion might also be extremely juicy and because of its potency it can begin to affect us in its preparation, pre-consumption. Writerly engagement with a textual onion can be unsettling; however, unlike the ideal writerly text, the real onion has a finite number of layers and is therefore manageable, unlike Silverman's intimidating description of the ideal writerly text:

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[1] Although the average reader probably does not reread the average mass market book, some others probably do. The issue, as I see it, is that the habit of NOT rereading is easily transferred to other kinds of books. I bought a picture book, Chris Van Allsburg's *Just a Dream* (hardcover), from the ten year old girl next door at a yard sale. She said, "That was one of my favorite books. I read it three times." Van Allsburg's books are not average mass market books. Picture books, particularly if they are favorites, are expected to be read and reread many times over. They belong to that marginal category of readers, "children." If a child reads one of her favorite picture books but three times, what are the chances that she'll reread a favorite novel later on? I realize that this is somewhat speculative and based on an isolated case, but it demonstrates that the likeness of books to limited-shelf-life-package-puddings can take effect in readers' minds at quite an early age.

> No "glue" holds together the disparate pieces of the writerly text; in it heterogeneity and contradiction are multiplied as much as possible. None of its codes is subordinated to any other—on the contrary, the writerly text strives for anarchy and incoherence. Barthes insists that even irony must be banished from that text's premises since it enacts a repressive discourse in which the voice of implied criticism dominates all others. Here numerous codes signify simultaneously, without regard to the rules of precedence or sequentiality. (246)

Whether or not the writerly text is unsettling is not the main issue, however. The defining feature of the writerly text and of writerly engagement is that it effects openings rather than closures; its structure is fragmentary or layered rather than single or unified. Based on Silverman's description, the three elements I will use towards a definition of writerly engagement in immediate-engaging-first-person narration are the lack of "glue" and the resultant segmentation of the text, the plurality of possibilities and the lack of irony, or of a " repressive discourse." A writerly engagement in narrative foregrounds the use of metalepsis, or the blurring of what is inside and what is outside the text, and questions the relationship between textual and extra-textual details.

A writerly text is not necessarily incoherent or anarchic. It may even appear to be readerly at first glance because its structure is linear and apparently coherent, and its composition is not obviously radical. The key component to the writerly text is that it consists of segments that are *not* seamlessly joined. Silverman explains:

> Whereas the notion of structure implies a kind of seamlessness or transparency, that of segmentation draws attention not only to the seams which join together the pieces which make up the whole, but to the ways in which the former exceed the latter. In short, it emphasizes the relative autonomy of each of the "lexia" or textual segments. (247)

The construction of the text is often quite obvious in a classic text, particularly conventions of plot and character. An experienced reader comes to expect conventional constructions, which are described as seamless because they are invisible—that is, they help the narrative flow by not drawing our attention to how the text is put together. However, when a plot is not as coherent or unified—that is, when the seams that hold the parts together are visible, and the reader can't help noticing that conventions are being broken and the narrative does not flow—then we say the narrative is disjointed, which is usually an expression of dissatisfaction. Thus, even an apparently linear text can become writerly when one begins to consider its individual segments and to question how they are joined.

The basis of the writerly text is perhaps more evident and accessible in children's literature. Picture books in particular provide fertile ground for discussion because although the pictures are there to illustrate the text, they are also clearly separate from the text and increase the plurality of meaning. John

Burningham's *Come Away from the Water Shirley* and Pat Hutchin's *Rosie's Walk* effectively illustrate the writerly nature of many picture books because the pictures provide an additional narrative to the written one. However, in this study I am concentrating on novel-length young adult narratives, which qualify as writerly narratives on different grounds than picture books. The grounds I have identified in *Booky* and *Homesick* are the use of metalepsis and the absence of dramatic, romantic and structural irony. Only verbal irony is used in immediate-engaging-first-person narration. The amount of time between what is narrated and the act of narration itself is too short to effect "a repressive discourse in which the voice of implied criticism dominates all others" (Silverman 246). When the narrator is not perceptibly older and wiser than the narrated character, she does not present herself ironically, or in a "repressive" and "critical" way. In fact, the restriction to verbal irony in immediate-engaging-first-person narration in autodiegetic narratives of development for young adults is one of the critical differences between them and the genres of the Bildungsroman, autobiography and the Künstlerroman; however, the use of immediate-engaging-first-person narration in young adult literature is not limited to these genres.

The idea of writerly engagement is best illustrated by the *Booky* books. Each chapter recounts a particular incident and all the incidents are organized in linear fashion by the chronology of Booky's growing up. There is no other evident plot. Not only do the temporal gaps between chapters draw our attention to the seams, but the use of photographs and advertisements provide futher "lexia" that are obviously not seamlessly integrated into Booky's narrative. I expand on these ideas and present *Booky* as writerly engagement, with an emphasis on the use of writerly illustrations as additional "lexia", in chapter II.

Homesick falls in the middle ground between the decidedly readerly and the decidedly writerly. In *Homesick*, Fritz declares that she made a conscious attempt to recount her experiences as a story. However, in the very process of selecting the salient events she will recount—as in *Booky*, because one can always only tell parts of one's life story—the choices Fritz makes clearly fall into segments. Again, these are organized by a temporal linear progression, and, again, the condensation of lived experience into written narrative draws our attention to the seams that join the segments and makes us aware of the simple, but inevitable fact that what has been excluded perforce exceeds what has been included. In *Homesick*, as in *Booky*, the use of archival material increases this awareness. The necessary exclusions are heightened by the fact that *Homesick* is an autobiography of childhood. I concentrate on the implications of immediate-engaging-first-person narration on the genre of autobiography in chapter III.

The photographs in *Homesick* and *Booky* do not merely illustrate the text; they are a reminder that the stories being recounted have their roots in a world outside the text. The photographs in *Booky* are particularly vexing because they are in a fictional text. Because they cannot support the text's realism, the photographs deconstruct the linear correlation between text and "illustration." Rather than serving as the proof of the matter, the photographs provoke the questioning of both text and illustration because, by their incongruity or lack of captions, they increase the reader's awareness of the gaps in the text. The effect of metalepsis, in this case, is to make the reader aware of the shakier foundation of the writerly text that lies beneath its readerly surface. That is to say that, while a first impression of *Booky* and *Homesick* suggests that they are simple, straightforward and accessible narratives, further investigation suggests that although the first impression is correct it is not complete. A closer look reveals the complicating factors that lurk just beneath the surface. Perhaps the best way of illustrating this point is to draw a comparison with *A Long Way From Verona* on the quality, or texture, of the texts as a whole—a kind of weighing, gauging and feeling of the textual fabric.

While *Booky* is a perfectly engaging narrative, it does not have the kind of literary quality that I am willing to accord *Verona*. And yet *Booky* cannot simply be reduced to the bare bones of a story well told. I address this matter in "Engaging in narrative: *Booky*" in chapter II. *Verona* is a "classic", or literary, text in the sense of the quality of language, imagery and symbolism used. One might say it is an elevated text because the use of language is heightened in a way that marks it as a written, rather than a spoken, text. Quite likely *Verona* requires a greater literary experience on the part of its reader in order to be enjoyed. *Booky* is a "popular" text in the sense that it follows literary conventions in a simpler and more accessible way; a reader does not require the same literary competence necessary for *Verona* to read and enjoy *Booky*. Nevertheless, the simplicity of *Booky* is deceiving—by no means does it slide into the simplistic. The difference between decoding allusions in a popular text such as *Booky* is similar to that of reading and understanding a classic text, but the order, or kind, of allusions is quite different. This difference is grounded in referentiality. Because of the use of metalepsis in *Booky* and *Homesick*, it is not so easy to dismiss them as "just stories"; there is too much evidence that they are connected to the real world on some level. I explore this connection in greater detail in chapters II and III. In chapter IV, I discuss Verona's use of direct address, how it fits the model of the classic text and thus how it effects readerly engagement. Barthes' concept of the readerly and the writerly is not just another set of binary opposites; it serves to untangle the relationship between form and content and between content and meaning, a relationship that is unavoidably "personal" in immediate-engaging-first-person narration.

Chapter II
Booky's Bildung & Writerly Engagement

> Even though the concept of the Bildungsroman has become ever more approximate, it is still clear that we seek to indicate with it one of the most harmonious solutions ever offered to a dilemma conterminous with modern bourgeois civilization: the conflict between the ideal of self-determination and the equally imperious demands of socialization. (Franco Moretti 15)

In the *Booky* trilogy, *That Scatterbrain Booky, With Love From Booky, As Ever, Booky*, Bernice Thurman Hunter describes the events that hightlight the growth and development of Beatrice Thompson, a.k.a. Booky, during the 1930s in Toronto. In reviews Bernice Thurman Hunter's work is usually discussed as historical fiction and, as such, has been praised for the way in which it recaptures the spirit and language of its historical setting, and for moving beyond stereotypes in its representation of character.[1] As a chronicle of Booky's life from the age of about nine through sixteen, the *Booky* trilogy crosses the genres of autobiography, Bildungsroman and Künstlerroman. The autobiographical element has clearly been blended with fiction. The most obvious cue is that the names of author and narrator-protagonist are not identical; they are, however, remarkably similar. The tension between autobiography and fiction fits the novelistic requirements of the genre of the Bildungsroman. And, while there are a number of descriptions of important moments in Booky's decision to become a writer, her narrative focuses equal attention on other developmental details. Becoming an artist is important but not central to Booky's narrative and this emphasis on her growing up is more in keeping with the genre of the Bildungsroman than the Künstlerroman. Overall, Booky's story is about who she is and where she's from and her narrative is a re-vision of history because it both recaptures the time and spirit of her youth and provides subtle critical commentary on it. As such it fits Rita Felski's model of the feminist Bildungsroman:

> The feminist Bildungsroman. . . narrates a story of development toward coherent selfhood through a process of moving into a wider community. Its temporal structuring of narrative reveals an essentially optimistic view of history as progressive emancipation, charting a process of learning through dialogue with and engagement in society. (140-41)

While Booky's narrative fulfills Felski's basic requirements, the text as a whole invites the reader to puzzle out the implications of engaging in narrative which, in turn, can chart the reader's process of learning about the relation of the text to the world. The *Booky* trilogy makes evident the need for an expansion of the terms of genre criticism— of the Bildungsroman in this case—to include the full range of narratives, including children's and young adults', which have been overlooked. Further, it opens a new set of doors onto the debate about postmodern texts. The overlap of fiction and history, personal memory and social fact that structures the *Booky* trilogy makes the narrative an example of writerly engagement—a narrative full of obvious seams, each of which can be argued not only to multiply the meaning of the narrative itself but also to highlight the effect of texts in the world.

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[1] See Judith Saltman's *Modern Canadian Children's Books* (58-59).

Booky's narrative begins in "September, 1932, the heart of the Depression" (*Scatterbrain* 1) and ends in September, 1939, shortly after Canada declares war on Germany (*Ever* 139). Although the beginning of a world war does not seem to be an optimistic point at which to end a narrative, Booky's narrative does "reveal an essentially optimistic view of history" because her family has pulled through the hardships of the Depression, Booky is gainfully employed, and she has negotiated an important stage of her self-determination and socialization.

The *Booky* trilogy is a good example of how the form of the Bildungsroman continues to evolve to reflect different individuals' processes of self-discovery in a given society at a given time. There has been a longstanding and heated debate about the term "Bildungsroman" and its applications. My use of it in this context shows that I favor flexibility and evolution. Hardliners like James Hardin might not approve of my use of the term in this context. In his introduction to *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, Hardin states:

> Such a survey in English appears to be long overdue, because hardly any other term is applied more frequently to a novelistic form and scarcely any is used more imprecisely. (x)

I have not set out to be imprecise. I use the term Bildungsroman not because the plot formula applies to Booky's narrative but because the term Bildung encapsulates the process of growing up and becoming in a broader sense than any of its English approximations. Hardin describes "Bildung" as follows:

> In the early nineteenth century—as to some extent even in these times—it implied "cultivation," education and refinement in a broad, humanistic sense, certainly not merely education with all the current institutional connotations of the word. It also strongly implied "formation" or "forming," a meaning that is not rendered in the usual English translations. (xi)

The cultivation and formation of character in the *Booky* trilogy demonstrate the inevitable pull between individual desire and social will. Booky's narrative traces her formation prior to the temporal span typical of the traditional Bildungsroman. The term itself was "reinvented by the illustrious Germanist Wilhelm Dilthey" (Hardin xiv) in 1906, by which time he "viewed the genre as a historical phenomenon whose time had passed" (xiv). Based on Karl von

Morgenstern's earlier work, Dilthey defines the Bildungsroman as the history of a young man,

> who enters into life in a blissful state of ignorance, seeks related souls, experiences friendship and love, struggles with the hard realities of the world and thus armed with a variety of experiences, matures, finds himself and his mission in the world. (xiv)

Booky is the history of a young girl who is not blissfully ignorant about many things. Her history chronicles the hard realities faced by her family and describes her immediate world. Her narrative ends shortly after her graduation from high school and her entry into the workforce. While she has matured and found her niche in the world, she will not find her true mission until later in life when she becomes a writer at last. The focus of Booky's narrative is her youth. According to Franco Moretti, in *The Way of the World*, youth is, in a sense, the formative period, or core, of life. Moretti claims that,

> what makes Wilhelm Meister [Goethe's quintessential Bildungsroman hero] and his successors representative and interesting is, to a large extent, youth as such. Youth, or rather the European novel's numerous versions of youth, becomes for our modern culture the age which holds the 'meaning of life': it is the first gift Mephisto offers Faust. (4)

Youth holds the meaning of life because the experiences of this time are carried forward and can continue to mark an individual throughout his life. It often takes considerable time and effort to undo negative formative experiences, or ways of perceiving the world. Youth is, rightly or wrongly, worshipped as a time of great freedom and potential.

The term Bildungsroman has been broadly used to describe a variety of developmental narratives, or as Hardin complains, "when viewed from a historical perspective" the term has been used "in a loose, casual, arbitrary, or undifferentiated manner" (xi). The fulcrum of these narratives is the point at which youth, considered as an inexperienced or immature state, levels with maturity, or at which the individual's will for self-determination balances with society's demand for a measure of conformity. While both the more traditional Bildungsroman and feminist Bildungsromane and the example of Booky's bildungs narrative have the factor of youth as the core of life in common, the time during which critical social formation takes place, the important difference between "adult" and "child" narratives is the degree of maturity attained by the narrator-protagonist before the narrative breaks off.

Booky's narrative breaks off after she proudly presents her mother with board money out of her first week's wages. Her mother is surprised and pleased and declares, "You're not a girl anymore. You're an independent woman now" (*Ever* 149). The end of Booky's narrative marks a turning point, a new beginning, which corresponds to the beginning point of the ahistorical definition of the Bildungsroman proposed by Jürgen Jacobs and Markus Krause in "Der deutsche Bildungsroman," and endorsed by James Hardin in his introduction:

> the term Bildung as it applies to the novel could be used in a broad sense linking it to the intellectual and social development of a central figure who, after going out into the world and experiencing both defeats and triumphs, comes to a better understanding of self and to a generally affirmative view of the world (xii-xiii).

Booky is really only just going out into the world at the end of her narrative. What happens to her there is briefly summarized in an epilogue but is not the subject of her Bildungs narrative.

The classical Bildungsroman ends in marriage. Franco Moretti argues that marriage operates "as a metaphor for the social contract" (22), "one no longer sealed by forces located outside of the individual (such as status), but founded on a sense of 'individual obligation'" (22). Moretti argues that individuals willingly forfeit their freedom once they are bound by the marriage contract. As proof he notes "that the classical Bildungsroman does not contrast marriage with celibacy as would after all be logical but with death (Goethe) or 'disgrace' (Austen)" (23). He notes further,

> For Schiller and Goethe. . . happiness is the *opposite* of freedom, the *end* of becoming. Its appearance marks the end of all tension between the individual and his world; all desire for further metamorphosis is extinguished. (23)

The idea that marriage provides a "happily ever after" ending to a life of "freedom" has not only been disproven but loudly deplored. Women's writing demonstrates that marriage has too often been the *end* of their becoming but not because it marks the beginning of happiness: it marks, rather, the end of their happiness, and the only way out has been through death or madness. Therefore, it is significant that Booky's narrative ends on a note of *in*dependence. The life of a husband and wife is anything but happily static, as her own parents' relationship attests.

The feminist Bildungsroman has concentrated its energies on exploding the myth of the placid and happy marriage. The introduction to *The Voyage In*, a collection of essays on the feminist Bildungsroman, notes that even though a number of feminist Bildungsromane "do begin with the heroine's childhood; more often. . . fiction shows women developing later in life, after conventional expectations of marriage and motherhood have been fulfilled and found insufficient" (7). Esther Kleinbord Labovitz, introducing her discussion of twentieth century female Bildungsromane, *The Myth of the Heroine*, maintains,

> A major aspect of the female heroine's *Bildung* will center on the conflict that arises over independence and freedom. Conditioned to be *dependent*, the *Bildungsromane* heroines reflect the dichotomy of the social conflict, the desire for independence and the fear of being cast out. These heroines, however, seem to be created by their authors to take risks and even hazard being cast out of respectable society and the family circle—leading the life of an exile. (15)

The life of an exile is a useful metaphorical approximation of adolescence, the years when the individual feels most conspicuously that she is not-child and not-adult. Novels of female adolescent Bildung, like *Booky* , are marked by the desire to please the self and the often conflicting desire to please others both in the family and in the individual's community of friends.[1] This struggle is invariably connected to issues of independence and autonomy. The narration of this struggle often delineates a process of self-discovery. Rita Felski identifies two kinds of self-discovery narratives in *Feminist Aesthetics*:

> 1-The first kind of text, which can be designated as a feminist *Bildungsroman*, is characterized by a historical and linear structure; female self-discovery and emancipation is depicted as a process of moving outward into the public realm of social engagement and activity, however problematic and fraught with difficulties this proves to be.
> 2-The second depicts self-discovery as a process of awakening to an already given mythic identity or inner self and frequently occurs in nature or in a generalized symbolic realm from which the contingent social world has been excluded. (127)

Booky, *Homesick*, and *Verona* are historical and linear and depict the process of self-discovery as a moving outward into the social realm rather than the moving inward of the novel of awakening.[2] This is most noticeable in Booky's narrative, mostly because it covers a longer time span and is marked by her graduation from high school and her entry into the work force. Felski comments that the Bildungsroman has a new function: to chart "the changing self-consciousness of women accompanying their gradual entry into the public domain" (133). In terms of adolescent narratives the public domain is, effectively, the adult domain. The public domain is the space in which youth needs to integrate itself and adapt to the accepted social dictates, or the spectrum of acceptable conventions, which govern a particular place at a particular time. The Bildungsroman describes the protagonist's entry into the public domain. The difference in an adolescent narrative is that the youthful protagonist's relation to the public domain is on par with the narrator's relation to it because the narrator is recounting what has happened to her in the recent past.

The point of difference between "adult" and "young adult" Bildungsromane is what Felski identifies as the teleological aspect of a Bildungsroman. Her definition of the Bildungsroman is based on four related points:

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[1] The same can be said of novels of male adolescent Bildung, like Kevin Major's *Hold Fast* and *Far From Shore* and Aidan Chambers' *Dance on My Grave*.

[2] Adolescent novels of awakening tend to be the domain of fantasy, and, interestingly, first-person narration is seldom used in fantasy (Robin McKinley's *Beauty* and Sheri Tepper's *Beauty* are exceptions). This difference can be accounted for by the fact that the awakening to an inner mythic identity is a pattern used predominantly in fantasy where the individual's journey is usually revealed to also serve a larger social purpose. The teleological aspect of a fantasy narrative of self-discovery is not necessarily ironic. The difference between a social realist and fantasy narrative of self-discovery is that the symbolic order of the fantasy world is often clearly established and therefore the value of the hero's quest is easier to ascertain than in realist fiction.

> the *Bildungsroman* can be construed as *biographical*, assuming the existence of a coherent individual identity which constitutes the focal point of the narrative; *dialectical*, defining identity as the result of a complex interplay between psychological and social forces; *historical*, depicting identity formation as a temporal process which is represented by means of a linear and chronological narrative; and *teleological*, organizing textual signification in relation to the projected goal of the protagonist's access to self-knowledge, which will in practice be realized to a greater or lesser degree. (135)

> The last two points determine the text's structure, which engenders an ironic distance between the perspectives of narrator and protagonist, which is a defining feature of the *Bildungsroman* as genre. Unlike the Romantic feminist text, which privileges the lost innocence of the protagonist as source of authenticity, the Bildungsroman critically underlines her ignorance and inexperience, emphasizing the discrepancy between the heroine's insufficient interpretation of events and the narrator's own superior understanding. (136)

The immediate-engaging-first-person adolescent Bildungsroman is biographical, dialectical and historical. But the narrator's understanding is not superior to the protagonist's, because not enough time has elapsed between the narrated events and the time of the narration; furthermore, because hindsight has not been sharpened to a critical edge, it is thus not particularly useful. An exception to this "rule" is the case of the frame narrative which builds the teleological aspect back in (as, for example, in Ruth Park's *My Sister Sif* and Jane Gardam's *Bilgewater*). The narrator's lack of superior understanding might be grounds enough to argue the opposite, that *Booky* is not a Bildungsroman. However, I think the genre as a whole has more to contribute to our understanding of self-development than just the vision of ironic hindsight. Intended audience seems to become an issue at this point because immediate-engaging-first-person narration is predominantly found in young adult fiction. It is not that young adults cannot understand, or make use of, irony. But dramatic, structural or romantic irony cannot be part of immediate-engaging-first-person narration because it undercuts immediacy and undermines the voice of the narrator. The Bildungsroman is an attractive genre because of its focus on the biography of the protagonist; it has the appeal of personal history. Although emphasizing "the heroine's insufficient interpretation of events" is one way of telling the story, one which is clearly didactic to some extent, another way of telling the same story is as if it had just recently taken place. Adapting the Bildungsroman in order to narrate the early years of a person's Bildung (before he turns 20, say) places the emphasis on the biographical, dialectical and historical aspects of his narrative and any teleological goal will be much more immediate, and will complement the shorter historical time frame. As long as we subscribe to the idea that youth is the core of life, such narratives have the potential to illuminate not only the subjective experiences of youth but also their subsequent experience and understanding of the world as adults. The Bildungsroman was once a thoroughly male genre. Women have since appropriated it in order to be able to narrate their experiences of Bildung. Definitions broaden and change with time and the overwhelming numbers of young adult first-person narratives suggest that the time for the Bildungs narrative of youth has come.

If anyone in a young adult Bildungsroman does have the superior understanding Felski identifies as a result of teleology, it is the author, who is usually an adult. However, in adopting the persona of implied author she strives to disguise her experience, to fit it to her narrator thus creating the blended voice of the implied author and the focalizer which marks her narration. The experienced reader is apt to notice textual moments where the implied author's voice is clearly discernible. Some examples of such moments are the remarks made by Jean regarding her mother's pregnancy (69), and Booky's about Billy's birth (*Scatterbrain* 29-33). Booky awakes to a commotion in the middle of the night and is sent back to bed by her father:

> Shaking like a bowlfull of jelly, I dove back in beside Willa, and crept as close to her as I dared.
>
> "What's the matter, Willa?" I whispered fearfully. "What's happening to Mum?"
>
> "It's the baby," she said quietly.
>
> "The baby? In Mum's stomach? Is it trying to get out? Is it hurting her? Why are they strapping her?"
>
> "Shut up!" she snapped, and I couldn't get another word out of her. She just lay there, perfectly still, staring up at the ceiling. (29-30)

I, as a reader, pause in these passages to consider how they were written, and what details are narrated because I view these as narrative moments of temptation where the real adult author could easily betray herself by allowing her narrator to know too much or rationalize her actions in an uncharacteristic way. In the above passage, the temptation could be to include details or rationalizations about birth procedures. A large part of Booky's terror is from having no idea what is going on. In Jean's case, she subordinates all her anger about not being told about her mother's pregnancy to her joy at having a sister. These moments have, then, almost been understated instead.

The lack of ironic distance between narrator and protagonist means that the adolescent Bildungs narrative has less opportunity to be overtly didactic. Reader and protagonist are led through an experience which is not necessarily recuperated and explicated by the narrator. This marks another aspect of difference with narratives modelled on the adult Bildungsroman pattern where, Felski points out,

> The education of the protagonist is simultaneously that of the reader: the feminist Bildungsroman is a didactic genre which aims to convince the reader of the legitimacy of a particular interpretative framework by bringing her or him

> to a cumulative and retrospective understanding of the events narrated in the text. (137)

In a sense then, the adolescent narrative relies more on the experiential effect of reading the text than on the retrospective insight imparted by the narrator. Therefore, the voice of the narrator operates somewhat differently in adolescent narratives. The lack of ironic distance heightens the reader's engagement in the narration because there are fewer, or no, breaks in the immediacy of the narration. This is true even in the case of Booky where the implied author's and the narrator's voices are often blended, where the implied author's voice can be heard through Booky's. The blending is due to the fact that Booky's narrative focuses on her whole family rather than only on herself. The blended voice is most obvious when explanatory details are conveyed.

Engaging in narrative: *Booky.*

In order to establish what makes *Booky* an engaging narrative and to try to demonstrate the experiential effect of reading the text, how the text unfolds, what details are presented and what they suggest, I now proceed, bit by bit, through the whole of the first chapter of the first book in the *Booky* trilogy. While this approach is an unusual critical tactic, I am using it both here and in chapter IV because such a literally close reading—even of just one chapter—gives a fuller sense of how the text acts on the reader than a more synthesized analysis, which is driven by the critic's own imperative.

On the cover of the current edition of *That Scatterbrain Booky* , a girl sits on the weathered, grey, wooden steps of a house. She is smiling for the camera, hands clasped and knees together. She has shoulder-length blond hair, bangs, freckles, blue eyes and wears a print dress (with what look like "Holly Hobby" scenes on it), white socks and black buckle shoes. Is this girl Booky, the alleged scatterbrain? Or is the photograph the publisher's attempt to suggest that the story you are about to read could be about a girl like this? There is nothing to suggest that this particular girl features in a film or television version of the book.

On the page that lists publication details the first line reads: "Grateful acknowledgement is made to the author for the photographs on pages 1, 38 and 178." There is no mention of the cover. On the facing page the book is dedicated "To Mum and Dad who loved me." The page facing page one is a photograph of three children, one of whom could be a younger version of the girl on the cover. The other two are presumably Willa and Arthur, whom we are introduced to in the first chapter: "A note from school."

"Skinny legs flying [the girl in the photographs is skinny], I ran straight home from school. My Mum was in the kitchen starting supper" (1). This is a vivid image of Booky in motion, one that is repeated throughout her narrative. The description of herself as "skinny legs flying" intimates the vision of the implied author seeing Booky from the outside. The voice of the implied author lies close to the surface of the narration and often breaks through; however, the implied author does not convey information that the narrator could not know. Appropriately, we meet Booky's mother making supper, likely out of next to nothing, in the kitchen. The opening line is descriptive and begins by introducing familiar details of setting and patterns of conversation. The repeated preface "same old" to Booky's question and to her mother's answer reinforces this sense of familiarity:

> I asked the same old question. "Where's Dad?"
> She gave the same old answer. "Out looking for work."
> It was September, 1932, the heart of the Depression. (1)

The precise date of September, 1932, is supposed to explain the familiar exchange about the father's whereabouts and the date is further clarified by the descriptive phrase "the heart of the Depression," another instance of the blended voices of implied author and narrator. Stories about hardship and poverty are often engaging because they can make one contemplate one's own relative stability and security. On the other hand, they are also often guilty of overdetermination. When this happens the force of the reader's engagement is undercut because the use of exaggeration undermines the "reality" of the description. Booky treats the subject of the Depression quite matter-of-factly. Her next comment does not pontificate on what September, 1932 means, but reverts to the scene in the kitchen: "I handed her the note the school nurse had given me and ran lickety-split up the stairs to the bathroom" (1). Booky is in motion again. "Lickety-split" relates back to the opening image of her skinny legs flying, and it adds an auditory dimension to the image as well as reinforcing the historic and regional setting of the narrative.

"When I came back down (with my dress caught in my bloomers), I knew something was wrong because Mum wasn't paying much attention to the note" (1). This sentence achieves two things: first it contributes to our perception of Booky as a scatterbrain who rushes so much that she does not notice (or is not bothered by) her dress caught in her bloomers and, secondly, it suggests not only that her mother should pay attention to the note because of the information it contains, but also that her mother's distraction and silence are unusual. This is the narrative hook. The next two sentences tell us about Booky's character and her (impetuous) initiatives to look out for herself. "I already knew what was in it. I had sneaked a look on the way home from school" (1). The note follows with a narrative intrusion that furthers our insight into Booky's character (and introduces her real name, Beatrice) by displaying her opinion of the nurse, the note, and her situation.

> *Beatrice is twenty-two pounds underweight,* said Miss Malloy's sterile handwriting. *We recommend that you contact your relief authorities. Any Canadian child exceeding the twenty-pound underweight limit is eligible for free government milk.* (1)

We are at the bottom of the page. Before turning it quickly to discover why her mother does not react to this news, for me, a number of adjectives cluster around the nurse's note: cold, clinical, somewhat accusatory, humiliating and patronizing. Booky's, or the blended voice of the narrator's, comment on her sterile handwriting is clearly pivotal in evoking such a response. Now the opening dialogue about the father's lack of work is put into focus. The mother's reaction to the note remains mysterious, however. Booky is somewhat perplexed, though also clearly relieved, by this.

> Ordinarily this information would have upset my mum to no end. But today she just plucked my dress out of my bloomers and remarked absently, "You'll have to eat up, Booky." (2)

The mother is clearly preoccupied—she is neither exasperated by the note nor by Booky's stuck dress.

The next three paragraphs continue to elaborate the scene and the setting. First Booky responds to her mother's reaction:

> I already ate up everything in sight, so that didn't mean much. But her calling me Booky did. It meant she wasn't mad at me and I wasn't going to get heck for anything. And it meant she loved me. That funny little nickname told me so. (2)

Now we know the significance of her name and can surmise why it figures in the title of the book—the story is about a girl who is loved even though her family life is marked by hardship. And, as Eileen Conway points out, in "Public images, private images," there is a marked improvement suggested by the cover of each book— Booky not only grows up, she grows more prosperous, and sweeter (45).

The mother is a key figure in the narrative; Booky features her mother's dreams and hard work quite prominently. She does not fight or resent her mother, but rather tries to make up for her unrealized dreams by faithfully representing her slavish hard work.

> My mum was a pretty woman. She had dark wavy hair, high olive cheekbones, and big brown eyes that flashed when she was mad and sparkled when she was glad. Today they were circled with blue and tired looking.
>
> Her stocky five foot frame was too well rounded for her liking. "I only weighed ninety pounds on my wedding day," she'd regularly sigh. But in spite of that she was a very good looking woman. (2)

This description is noteworthy for two reasons: first, because it shows how thoroughly blended the implied author's voice is with the narrator's, and second, because of the emphasis on her mother's good looks, which are frequently overshadowed by fatigue and over-exertion. It also conveys a sense of her spirit and strength despite her small size.

> In her flat little size three shoes she was barely two inches taller than me. Standing on tip-toe, I kissed her ruddy cheek. She gave me a fierce hug that cracked my skinny bones.
>
> That was my mum.

Here again the narrator's blended voice describes the contrast between the mother's size and strength. Booky's skinniness is also remarked upon once again. The closeness between mother and daughter is described next.

> "Change your dress, Booky," she said, slivers of potato peelings flying from her paring knife.
>
> "Okay Mum."
>
> I wasn't always so obedient, but when my mother called me Booky (she pronounced the first part Boo, like Boo-hoo) I'd jump off the roof for her. I ran back upstairs two at a time. (2)

Neither Booky nor her mum seem to sit still for long—they are forever rushing about in a flurry of activity.

Next Booky proceeds to briefly introduce her older sister and brother.

> My sister Willa wasn't home yet. She was the oldest and in high school. She had a long walk home. My brother Arthur was next. And then me. His school bag was on the table, so I knew he had been in and gone out again. He was lucky. He never had to stay in for arithmetic. That's what had kept me late, arithmetic. (2-3)

Booky has a scholastic inferiority complex. Her sister excels at school and with both her siblings' reputations preceding her Booky finds it difficult to be confident about her schoolwork. Booky's list of characteristics is increasing: she is skinny, fast, bad at arithmetic and, we are told next, physically adept:

> In my old play dress and holey running shoes I made a bee-line for the back door. Rummaging under the rickety steps I found my hoop and stick, and controlling it expertly, I flew like the wind up the street to Audrey's. Not once did my hoop wobble or fall over and have to be started again. (3)

This paragraph clearly shows that despite her old holey clothes Booky still has fun. She is on the run again, flying like the wind, which provides us with a brief interlude before the description of her friend.

> Audrey Westover was my best friend. She was adopted. That meant her parents could afford her. They picked her out on purpose. When I first found that out I ran all the way home to ask my mum if I was adopted too. I hoped I was because that would mean Arthur wasn't really my brother. (3)

Audrey's life stands as a significant marker for comparison to Booky's. Booky is not bitter about the contrast, and is quite willing to benefit from her association whenever possible, though never in a greedy way. The comment about hoping to disprove her relation to her brother prepares us for her envy of Arthur—especially of his freedoms as a boy—and the subsequent gender inequalities that she perceives. Booky's wish to find out she is adopted is not fulfilled.

> Mum greeted the question with a big hoot of laughter.
>
> "Go on with you, Bea," she chided good-naturedly. "It's easy enough for me to get children without going out looking for them." (3)

Booky has turned around what is more typically a childhood fear of discovering that one is adopted into an opportunity for disowning her brother. In the hilarity of the moment her mother hints at the true genesis of children, which, naturally, sparks Booky's interest.

> Now that was my chance to ask something I'd always wanted to know—how people go about getting children—but just then the lady from next door came over to borrow an onion and the thought went clean out of my head. (3)

How convenient. That thought gone, it is time to get back on track and detail the differences between Audrey's home and Booky's. Despite the introductory nature of the first chapter, one cannot complain that the details are presented in a dreary, uninviting fashion. The numerous background, or explanatory, details are carefully interwoven with asides and the whole follows the general outline of what Booky does when she gets home from school.

After introducing her friend Audrey's home, Booky takes the opportunity to elaborate, at length, on the rickety porch steps that are part of her own home.

> I could hardly believe the difference between the Westovers' house and ours. Ours, the one we were living in now, was a skinny, stuck-together row house. The uneven floors, upstairs and down, were covered with cracked linoleum, splotched brown where the pattern had worn off. Naked light bulbs dangled on frayed black wires from tattered, papered ceilings, and we didn't own such a thing as a house lamp. All our furniture was old second-hand stuff. (3-4)

The above passage suggests that moving is not an unusual fact of life for them, a fact that is substantiated in the next passage. The description then moves to the exterior:

> Outside, the house hadn't seen a lick of paint in years. Both front and back porches were made of peeling, rotted wood with broken steps and unsafe, worm-eaten railings.
>
> Behind the house stretched a narrow weed-patch yard, enclosed by a high dilapidated board fence. We never managed to stay in one place long enough to have a flower bed or to grow grass from seed. Mum said that was her heart's desire, to stay put long enough to have a perennial bed across the front and a vegetable garden in the back. (4)

The quest for a house and a stable home, preferably owned rather than rented, is the central motif of her mother's dream. In the meantime, she makes the best of what they have and prides herself on her fastidious cleaning.

> But one thing redeemed our house. Inside, it was the cleanest house in the world. Our old furniture gleamed with lemon oil. Hawe's floor wax shone on the patternless linoleum, and the air fairly tingled with vinegar and lysol. I'll bet anything you could have eaten your supper right off our kitchen floor without getting so much as one germ

> in your mouth. (4)

A little pride goes a long way to undercut stereotypes. Who said if you were poor you had to be dirty? is clearly the implication here. Booky's mother's devotion to cleanliness means the Thompsons do not succumb to the indignities of pest- and rodent-filled dwellings.

Audrey's house gets quite a short description.

> By comparison, the Westovers' house was a miniature mansion: a fashionable bungalow situated at the far end of Lilac Street. It had a cement front porch with a wrought-iron railing, and it was all hemmed in with grass and shrubs and flowers. (4)

"Miniature mansion" and "fashionable bungalow" sum up the gulf of difference. There is less to be said about an impeccable house than about a house teetering on the edge of complete decay—or so this comparison suggests.

Or perhaps, as the rest of the comparison suggests, other aspects are more important, notably those aspects that elucidate what it means, in practical terms, to live in a wealthy household.

> Inside, it was so filled with carpets and furniture and lamps and things that it gave me a peculiar, crowded feeling. But the biggest difference, the one *I* noticed the most, was on their supper table. (Except that at Audrey's, supper was called dinner and dinner was called lunch. To me, lunch was brown-sugar sandwiches in a paper bag.) (4)

This distinction in nomenclature is an indication of class. Audrey's family is not simply wealthier, they belong to a separate social sphere.

> The Westhovers' supper table was always loaded down with more food than they could possibly eat at one sitting. I couldn't get over that. Most of the time they had food left over. At our house there were never any leftovers and we often went away still hungry. Of course I knew the reason for the difference. Audrey's father had a job. In a bank. (4-5)

Booky remarks on the quantity of food, which is undoubtedly the most remarkable point of difference from her perspective, but the difference in the quality of the food in the respective households would likely also be of interest. Booky hits the mark with her explanation that having a job allows one to eat one's fill; however, Mr. Westhover does not have just any job, he works "in a bank," which affords him a certain prestige, as the next paragraph makes clear:

> They usually ate early because Mr. Westhover finished work at four o'clock. He'd drive all the way from downtown Toronto to eastend Birchcliff in his 1929 Model A Ford. It was the only car on Lilac Street, and when it came rattling round the corner blaring *AhhOOgaa!*, kids would run like stink from all directions and jump on the running board for a free ride. (5)

The next paragraph demonstrates the boundaries built into Booky's friendship with Audrey.

> Sometimes Mrs. Westhover let me sit on the back kitchen steps and pat the dog while Audrey ate her supper. Spot was a friendly Boston Bull. Mrs. Westhover said he had a pedigree, but I looked him over from his pushed-in nose to this twisty tail and I couldn't find a thing wrong with him. (5)

Booky's misunderstanding of pedigree is another example of the blended voice of implied author and focalizer-narrator. The joke is quiet and unelaborated—Booky presents her misunderstanding as if she understood the matter of pedigree perfectly and as if the adult were the one who was confused. In this regard the irony is similar to that of the naive narrator in structural irony; however, the irony here is one of a small number of isolated moments and not part of a larger structural irony that persists in demonstrating Booky's persistent naiveté. The reader's ability to "get" this joke depends on his vocabulary. The beauty of this joke is that its verbal irony provides humor without belittling Booky. This joke also shows the divide between deprived-child-of-struggling-parents and adult-pedigreed-dog-owner, between the class who eat supper and the class who eat dinner.

> Spot ate the very same food as the rest of the family. Just smelling his lovely, meaty dish was enough to make me drool. (5)

Luckily for Booky her patience is often rewarded:

> Often, after supper, Mrs. Westover would offer me the leftovers. "So it won't go to waste," she'd say off-handedly. But I knew it was her way of being charitable without making me feel my neck. (5)

Mrs. Westover's intentions are undoubtedly charitable and good. But they are also undeniably double-edged. Booky, however, is accepting; she does not comment on whether she is ever invited in or whether she resents watching Spot eat. Instead, she justifies these proceedings—I find myself speculating that the following justification is to prevent the narratee's possible desire to misinterpret the situation.

> She was nice, Mrs. Westover. Audrey's father was nice too. He never seemed to mind how much food his wife gave away. Not even once did I see that "What's going on here?" look cross his face. Sometimes he even joked with me. I think he liked me. (5)

What is more practical and important, however, is that Booky likes being given leftovers—it means that there is more food in sight for her to eat up.

Booky's description then returns to the narrative present. She is back in motion and, as luck would have it, carrying home some of the Westhovers' charity.

> On this particular night I came galloping back down the street with my hoop and stick under my arm, half a store-bought apple pie in one hand and a loaf of yesterday's bread in the other. Mum was pleased as punch. (6)

The subject of food rounds out the concluding paragraphs of the chapter by once again drawing attention to the results of unemployment.

> Dad came in the back door right behind me. He always came home about the same time as the working men. He looked tired and thin. Under his wispy fair hair his square-jawed face was pale and drawn.
>
> "Hi, Dad!" I gave him a toothy grin to cheer him up.
>
> "Hello, Bea," he answered without a trace of a smile. (6)

Booky is well aware of the negative force of tension and frustrations. She is happy because she is bringing home extra food and hopes that supper will break the spell of gloom.

> Everybody was home now, so we all sat down around the oilcloth covered table. All except little Jakey who still used a high chair. (6)

Now we have been introduced to the whole family: Mum, Dad, Willa, Arthur, Bea and Jakey. The family meal is a recurring motif throughout Booky's narrative. Food is something to be enjoyed and Booky is generously appreciative of her mother's culinary miracles.

> There was no butter on the table, so we dipped our bread in the stew Mum had made. Boy, she made good stew! Even without meat. We sopped up every drop until the last crust of bread was gone and our plates were shiny clean.

The intricacies of negotiation surface during dessert:

> Then Mum divided the pie into six skinny pieces. Dad said he was full and didn't want any. Even I didn't believe that. He just wanted us kids to have his share. So Arthur and I obliged by fighting over it. Willa left the table in disgust. Mum settled the argument by giving the extra piece to me. Arthur got mad and stomped out of the room. (6)

Her mother's justification for the settlement is spoken to Arthur but directed at the father.

> "The school nurse says Bea is a bit underweight," explained Mum, trying to sound casual. "She can do with something extra." (6)

The father's response is predictable, like an old refrain:

> "I've *got* to get a job!" declared Dad for the umpteenth time. (6)

Booky eagerly wolfs down the extra ration and proceeds to display more than a toothy grin in another heroic effort to dispel the gloom she feels descending once again.

> I finished the sliver of pie in no time flat. Then, seeing Mum and Dad looking depressed over their tea, I said, "Don't worry, Mum. You neither, Dad. I'm strong as a horse—watch!" (7)

Booky prepares to perform a daring feat:

> Willa was at the sink with her back to me, doing the dishes.

> I crept up behind her and lifted her bodily off the floor. She must have outweighed me by fifty pounds at least. It felt more like a ton. But I had to prove how strong I was so I hung on, staggering backwards. (7)

The performer was not up to the task after all. She has done her bit and is now more than willing to accommodate the needs of those around her by stopping.

> "Bea! You put me down!" screeched Willa.
>
> I could hardly wait to oblige. I thought I was going to faint, and I must have turned white because Mum looked scared and made me sit right down and have a sip of tea.
>
> "Tea revives you," she said. (7)

Booky's performance has succeeded in drawing out everyone involved.

> "Don't you do that again!" Dad said with a show of anger. "You might have broken your back, you foolish girl." (7)

Overall, Booky's scheme is successful.

> But I think it made them feel a bit more cheerful, just the same, because they didn't have their usual fight after supper. (7)

A typical day has ended unusually. Two questions remain. The first question is of interest to both Booky and the reader: What is bothering her mother? The second question regards something the reader must wait for Booky to reveal: And why do her parents usually fight? Suspense is a traditional measure used to achieve engagement and in this case it is used simply and effectively. The first question helps to demonstrate the increasing identification between the narrator and the implied reader; they are both interested in making the same discoveries. The narrative is constructed in a way that allows the reader to feel that he and Booky make some of their discoveries simultaneously, which heightens the sense of the immediacy of the narration. The second question demonstrates that despite this increasing identification it is still the narrator who controls the narrative.

The defining feature of Booky's narrative is its straightforward, colloquial, oral history style. Her presentation of herself and of the events she relates is honest, simple and open. As a reader I feel that Booky is a warm and engaging narrator because she narrates daily routines and the highlights of a particular year's events, all of which are centered on her relationships with family and friends.

Writerly Engagement

Booky is engaging because, despite the often blended voice of the implied author and narrator, the narrative privileges the focalizer's (as opposed to the narrating agent's) view. *Booky* is writerly rather than readerly because of the slippage between the world of the narrative and the real world. That is to say that, as a text, *Booky* is open and plural particularly because of the effect of metalepsis manifested in the use of photographs and "illustrations" and because of the fragmentary nature of the narrative. In *S/Z* Barthes says:

> There may be nothing to say about writerly texts. First of all, where can we find them? Certainly not in reading (or at least very rarely: by accident, fleetingly, obliquely in certain limit-works): the writerly text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore. . . . the writerly text is *ourselves writing,* before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. The writerly is the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure. (4-5)

I use Barthes' concept of the writerly to work from the product towards a production. *Booky* is more novelistic than novel; it employs structuration more than structure. That is to say, it gestures at many of the conventions of the novel and of structure but without being fully bound by them—thus, the lack of plot. By engaging in the narrative in a writerly, rather than a readerly, way I value the work for what it is rather than for what it isn't. By exploring the chinks in the four walls of its structure and foundation, and viewing them as a positive feature, one that helps to explain the flow of ideas and energy between "reality" and "fiction," I can discuss what the text has to offer without being stopped "by some singular system." Rather than bemoaning the text's weaknesses as a failure to achieve a literary ideal (alas! this narrative has no plot!) I can recognize and try to understand them and determine whether or not they might be contributions rather than detriments to the text.[1]

Not all that much has been said about writerly texts. Barthes' idea has been illustrated and discussed by a number of scholars, like Kaja Silverman, Jonathan Culler, Mary Bittner Wiseman and Michael Moriarty, but because the writerly text itself is a rarity discussions of the writerly text or of writerly reading tend to be limited to a description of the theoretical ground for the distinction between the readerly and the writerly. The four scholars I cited all cover basically the same ground and explicate Barthes' idea . Nor has the concept of writerly reading been much made use of.[1] I presume that one reason why the idea of the writerly has not been put to use other than as a concept of which to be aware is that it is impractical. The writerly is based on anarchic play and is basically at odds with the aim of narrative and criticism, both of which play within a set of rules, or conventions, which seek to organize and make sense of a series of events. While short bursts of chaos are manageable, and perhaps even thrilling, extended stretches or continuous chaos is exhausting and disorienting and renders the wild abandon of utter plurality meaningless rather than meaningful.

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[1] The *Booky* books do not suffer because of the lack of plot but not all weaknesses can automatically be construed as strengths simply by engaging in a writerly reading.

For the concept of a writerly text to have greater currency it needs a more practical application. As a concept it is useful in establishing theoretical positions. But if it can only be applied to (rare) anarchic texts, and the ideal writerly text can't even be written, then what use is it? Following through on Barthes' idea of the writerly reading, the kind of reading he does in *S/Z*, I think that the concept of the writerly can be practically applied to texts which are not anarchic at first glance. Narratives like Booky's appear to be coherent but once one begins to examine them closely their seams are found bulging with enough questions to keep pluralists in ecstasy.

Booky is not an intentionally writerly text. Part of what makes *Booky* an engaging narrative is also what makes it a writerly text. The effect of metalepsis, the crossing of planes between the fiction and the "real world," draws the reader into the story and opens up a diversity of possibilities which make a writerly reading possible. As the reader becomes hooked into Booky's story, she is faced with textual items which are extra (or are they?) to the narrative, the photographs for instance, and thus the possibility that the story is not just Beatrice Thompson's but also Bernice Thurman Hunter's is strongly suggested. While readerly engagement refers to the reader's "classic" involvement in the text, where the character-narrator is clearly a character and not a "real" person, writerly engagement refers to the reader's involvement in the production of meaning that exceeds the narrative proper— for example, constructing the links between the text proper and the photographs. Thus, writerly engagement is the result of metalepsis as the result of which the character-narrator overlaps with a "real" person to some degree (which is not likely to be quantifiable).

To begin an assessment of Booky as a writerly-engaging-narrative certain basic questions must be posed. How carefully thought through was the putting together of material for Booky? Are the photographs, newsclippings and advertisements original components of the narrative or are they extras? I presume that on some level the intention (on either the author's or the publisher's part) was to provide additional material and information to verify the historical setting and thereby to satisfy curiosity. The actual effect, however, is to highlight curiosity rather than satisfy it. Why do it this way? Why this information? Why these pictures? More information just allows for more questions if the information provided is not clearly geared at answering particular questions. The "information" provided by the illustrations in *Booky* is not clearly geared at answering particular questions and the result of adding it to a narrative that consists primarily of incidents rather than events, and is therefore already arguably fragmented, is that both the foundation and the structure of the text are shaky.

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[1] A small number of people have taken up the idea, however. For example, Robert T. Eberwein extends the idea of the pairings novel and novelistic, structure and structuration etc. to genre and the generic in a discussion of three films entitled "Genre and the Writerly Text." Eberwein argues that "The generic is a writerly text rather than a readerly one" (64) and that because "We no longer have a readerly relation to the readerly text or genre. . . we must engage in a writerly activity by letting the implications of the genres work on us and by providing the ordering principle ourselves rather than deriving it from the stabilizing conventions of the genres" (64).

Its shaky foundation is precisely what makes *Booky* engaging because the very shakiness of the text makes it vulnerable. And by vulnerable I do not mean to suggest weak, but rather open and unprotected in a positive sense. Sound structure and solid foundations are the hallmarks of the classic, or readerly text. The writerly text, by contrast, makes instability a virtue, the virtue of plurality. In chapter I I stated that writerly engagement is premised on three factors: the first is the segmentation of the text which is indicated by the lack of "glue" holding the parts together (as opposed to the invisible [well-glued] seams called for by the readerly text), second is the plurality of possible meanings of the text, and third is the lack of dramatic, romantic or structural irony. These three factors contribute to the vulnerability of the text because they can so easily fall prey to negative criticism. Texts are often praised for their seam*less* presentation and therefore a text full of evident seams could easily be criticized as being poorly constructed, even though it is clear that reality is not seamless. Likewise, the long-standing premise of the classic/readerly text was that it contained one core meaning and, even though reading practices have changed, the assumption remains, especially with regard to children's and young adult books, that books contain messages and/or lessons for the erudition of protagonists and readers. While it can be argued that *Booky* contains such messages or lessons, her narrative, like the life it represents, is polyvalent; there is no single core meaning. In fact many passages lend themselves to lively debate about just what they mean—often because of what remains unsaid. Such gaps are often the direct result of focalization. One example is this description of a park entrance where Booky's family is about to have a Sunday school picnic:

> Right at the entrance to the park was a huge canvas sign stretched between two trees. On it in big black letters were the words *Gentiles Only*.
>
> "What does it mean, Mum?" I was curious.
>
> "It means no Jews allowed."
>
> "What are we?" I asked anxiously.
>
> "We're Gentiles," she said.
>
> I was glad because if we were Jews we couldn't have our picnic in High Park. (144)

An adult focalizer would be less likely to leave it at that and, if he did, it would likely have different implications. Such a passage lends itself to ironic commentary by the narrating agent, who, in distant-engaging and in distancing narration, often uses such opportunities for making ironic comments on his thoughts or actions in story time. In immediate-engaging narration the narrating agent's commentary is limited by the focalizer. Booky's main concern here is going to the park for the picnic. She notes the sign but does not dwell on it once she determines that it doesn't apply to her. There is an underlying irony here, but it is not made explicit. The irony is that no matter how poor Booky and her family are they still have certain privileges that do not extend to all people. However, because the irony is only implied, it is suggestive; it does not effect an overriding voice of criticism. Booky, the narrator, simply states a fact about Jews and Gentiles. The combination of the three factors that mark the writerly text results in a series of layers that form the textual onion. Each chapter in the *Booky* trilogy is a separate layer of the textual onion; the plurality of the whole is the result of the wealth of cumulative layers, all of which contribute to the production of the many meanings that comprise the whole.

The most obvious marker of *Booky* as a writerly text is the use of photographs throughout the narrative. All three novels have photographs on the cover. The only one which is acknowledged is on the cover of *As Ever*, which is by Gordon Wyatt. In "Public Images, private images: Photographic illustrations in the *Booky* trilogy," the only article on Thurman Hunter's work, Eileen Conway discusses the problematic relation between the text and the illustrations, which she describes as "an arresting and disturbing mixture of private, personal, captionless, autonomous, random family snapshots, and, in contrast, mass-produced commercial images, many of which are photographic in origin" (45). Conway illustrates the disjunction between the narrative text and the mélange of captionless material used to illustrate it by examining how any attempt to resolve this disjunction forces the reader to determine the "primacy of meaning"—a debate in which text and illustration vie for control. Regarding the covers Conway comments:

> Only the photographic covers of the three novels match our usual expectations of illustrative form and content. Separately and together, they show the heroine at three stages of her life; each is carefully composed to illustrate not only significant physical features, such as size, and circumstances, such as poverty, but also some significant manifestation of the heroine's state of maturity and/or her prevailing mood in the novel in question. (45)

All three novels also have photographs facing the first page of each opening chapter. These photographs are all from the author's own collection and appear to be of her and other family members. They work similarly to the cover photos, showing Beatrice/Bernice at three stages of her life. Each of the three stages is presented in a separate book. I am going to limit my discussion to the first book in the trilogy, which has the most illustrations and which is representative of how illustrations function throughout the trilogy.

Writerly Illustrations: *That Scatterbrain Booky*

Knowing that the first photograph is from the author's own collection immediately raises the question about the story's autobiographical content. How can a "real" family photograph represent fictional characters? As I already mentioned in my discussion of the opening chapter to *That Scatterbrain*, the first photograph facing the first page of the first chapter is presumably of Willa, Arthur, and Beatrice/Booky. They are standing in a garden, and Willa, the eldest, has an arm draped around the shoulder of each of her siblings. There is no clear evidence here of the poverty which is suggested on the cover photo by the worn state of the paint on the stairs "Booky" sits on. The two older siblings have straight faces but Booky is making a face that makes her look somewhat impish. She is dressed in a long baggy white shirt and short set. The image corresponds to the character conveyed by the narrative. However, because the photograph is not captioned there is nothing to prevent the obvious equation invited by the juxtaposition of photograph and text: author equals narrator-protagonist.

The next illustration, on page 36, is from an advertisement of a sewing machine from the Eaton's Archives. It is tucked into the left hand corner of the text. At this point in the narrative Booky is desperate to tell her friend Audrey about the birth of her brother the previous night but

> She just kept changing the subject to the lamb's wool coat her father was having made for her mother for Christmas. She was all excited about it because he said there would be enough fur left over to trim a coat for her. And maybe a muff too! (36)

Booky is unperturbed. Her mother has just managed to make over cousin Lottie's coat for her, with a rabbit fur collar, before the baby was born and, despite the fact that "the trial period for the sewing machine has already run out," before "the horse-drawn Eaton's wagon pull[ed] up to the door and repossess[ed] the precious sewing machine"(37). Eileen Conway identifies the sub-theme "of material prosperity and desirable possessions" as one of the effects of the illustrations, which in the case of

> the Eaton's pictures project an oddly ironic message, especially striking in their function as part of a children's book. What they illustrate, most often, is not the achievement of the tokens of prosperity and comfort; instead, they form a kind of negative image of the Thompson family's grinding poverty. The advertising text, and the sharply rhetorical accompanying illustrations, both thrust upon our awareness the merchandise that embodies convenience, comfort, and beauty. As such they furnish a bitterly exact record of what the various members of the family, especially Booky and her mother, long for in vain. A substantial part of the text in the earlier novels details how Booky's mother contrives to possess such

> desirable consumer goods as a washing machine or sewing machine, although only for poignantly brief periods. (47-8)

Conway's point, which she makes more than once, that the illustrations serve to ironize a situation described in the text, brings me back to a question I raised earlier: How carefully thought through was the choice of illustrations? Were they an afterthought? The narrative itself is not ironic. How can the photos be seen to ironize the text when a writerly text is marked by the absence of irony? This apparent inconsistency is further complicated by the fact that the irony itself is a result of metalepsis: of the reality represented by the images imposing itself on the fiction. Thus the image of the sewing machine does not simply illustrate what a treadle sewing machine looks like; it also functions as a negative image, the image of that which was taken away.

Booky fears that her new baby brother might also be taken away because her parents can't afford him. She was not longing for a new baby brother but once he is there he consumes much of her attention. Because she witnessed a quarrel between her parents about giving the baby up for adoption while her mother was pregnant, her fear of losing him often results in her "squeez[ing] into his little iron cot with [her] arms wrapped protectively around him" (39). Booky feels that her new brother, Billy, will "always be special" (34) to her because he is born on her birthday. On the second to last page of chapter 6, "A special birthday present" (on the overleaf after the picture of the sewing machine picture), there is a photograph of "Booky" and "Billy." Text and image are not truly in conjunction, however. In Booky's narrative "Christmas was just around the corner" (39) and Billy is just over a month old. The photograph is taken in the summer and "Billy" must be between seven and nine months old. So far, then, all the children appear to be based on "real life" models. The photo on page 38 suggests that Booky continues to be "carried away" with her baby brother, that her fondness and helpfulness persist. The girl in the picture looks quite a bit older than the girl in the first picture, which suggests that the girl in the first picture (on page 1) is seven or eight, not nine. The effect of the photo on page 38, then, is to make the reader reassess the temporal relation of the two family photos, to project ahead of the narrative by half a year plus, and to reassert the link between character-narrator and author, between fiction and autobiography.

A good example of the differing order of allusions possible in a writerly text is the double-page spread photograph of the Santa Claus parade, courtesy of the Eaton's Archives, in the following chapter. The magnitude of the Santa Claus parade in Booky's mind is on par with, say, a literary allusion to Shakespeare. Granted, the parade is a historic event but it is of a different order than an event in which the emphasis is on its being historic rather than just an event in history. The photograph makes it seem historic and heightens the parade's importance by virtue of its inclusion in the text. According to Booky, the best thing about the Eaton's Santa Claus Parade is that "it was absolutely free" but her father denies such a simple view: ". . . in a pig's eye it was free. . . . it was nothing but a big conspiracy by the rich capitalist Eaton Company against the downtrodden poor of Toronto" (40). Asked what a conspiracy is, he replies, "Conspiracy is when

Eaton's makes poor children hanker after things their parents can't afford" (40) and yet, he "never failed to take us to the parade" (40). Booky's mother holds the Eaton's company in such high esteem that she tells her children that "only the real Santa was allowed to come to Toronto in Eaton's Santa Claus Parade" (43).[1] The parade mirrors the effects of advertisements in the Eaton's catalogue by creating a longing for an impossible ideal.

The double-page spread photograph accentuates the impossibility and vain longing that mark Christmas in the Thompson household that year. The glories and indulgences of the parade and the Crystal Palace in Eaton's department store are starkly contrasted to the prevalent gloom and the complete absence of Christmas preparations in Booky's home:

> There was nothing to show it was the day before Christmas. No last minute preparations, no whispered secrets, no delicious smell of bread and sage and onions coming from the mixing bowl. The red and green crepe-paper streamers were still in the box in the attic. . . (52)

Neither Willa nor Arthur hang up their stockings and "[i]n a queer voice" Willa tells Bea she doesn't "think Santa is coming this year" (55). When they wake up there are four stockings with "an apple, an orange and a little bag of candy" (57) but there is still no tree. A man from the Star Santa Claus fund delivers four boxes for the younger children. Booky's contains a sweater coat and matching toque and "a Betty-Boop doll with huge painted eyes looking over to one side, black-painted hair and fat stuck-together legs" (59). When Audrey's parents deliver a package of food for a Christmas dinner Bea's parents begin to fight again. Late in the afternoon her father's

> anger burst out in a torrent of rage and the swear words he used were something wicked. Mum just hurled them back in his face. Dreadful, hateful, evil words flew back and forth across the room like lightning bolts in a thunderstorm. I don't know what she said to make him hit her. All I remember was the terrible sound, like a clap of thunder. A piercing scream pealed from her throat scaring the wits out of us kids. . . (61)

At the end of the day, after a satisfying meal and a few pleasant hours with her siblings, Booky lies in bed thinking. She remembers what Santa brought Audrey last year and, as if the contrast between their lives is not stark enough, especially considering Booky's thoughts about why her mother had even considered giving Billy up for adoption, there is another Eaton's advertisement, for a Beauty Doll—quite a contrast to the Betty-Boop doll in the Star box. The placement of the advertisement puts an odd emphasis on one line of text: "Last year Santa had brought [Audrey] an Eaton Beauty Doll" (64). The narrative focus is on having the means for a comfortable life, on adoptive parents who would have been "rich and kind and good, who could have given Billy wonderful Christmases so he wouldn't have to find out about Santa Claus too soon" (64). The Eaton's Beauty doll, we are led to believe, "naturally" fits into the scenario of a family in which "Billy had lots of milk and a warm cot and parents who didn't fight all the time [and in which Billy, therefore] probably wouldn't cry at all" (65). The Beauty doll becomes the poor child's icon of a secure home, filled with love, food and consumer goods (some of which are delivered by Santa).

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[1] Eaton's is important to the Canadian imagination in other Canadian texts as well, for example, Roch Carrier's *The Hockey Sweater* and Gabrielle Roy's *Enchantment and Sorrow*.

The next chapter, "Hiding from the bailiff," makes short work of Booky's fantasy. She is home for lunch, because she has been expelled from the free meal program for complaining about the food, on a washday. Her mother is "tired and crabby" because she's been "scrubbing on the board for seven people" (68). It is not one of the times she has an electric washing machine on a thirty day trial. Facing this description is another photo from the Eaton's Archives showing a horse and, presumably, the driver of an Eaton's wagon— he who takes away "unsatisfactory" (that is, unpaid for) merchandise. The photograph is placed facing a description of how people on "pogey" (68) managed to temporarily avail themselves of modern conveniences. Eileen Conway notes that "the institutionalized memory of the commercial archive, fixing a benign image of retail distribution, is ironically converted into a private family memory of anxiety, deprivation, and overwork" (48). The bottom third of the page begins to relate how Booky came to be expelled from the lunch program. This description continues for another two and a half pages. When the analepsis ends and the present of the narrative resumes, "the door flew open and Mum's hand shot out and yanked me inside" (72), and Booky, her mother and her two younger brothers lock the doors and hide upstairs while the bailiff bangs on their door. Although there is no photograph of the bailiff, he is linked with the anonymous Eaton's driver: both men have the unpleasant job of taking valuables away from people who need them but cannot afford to pay for them. The Eaton's driver's job is forgiven and understood, his retrieval of the merchandise is part of the bargain agreed to when ordering items "on trial." By contrast, the bailiff's job is resented and causes fear and anxiety. The family refers to him as "Ratman" (72):

> Oh, how I hated that man! I used to pray he would drop dead on the sidewalk so we wouldn't have to worry any more about being put out on the street with our furniture. Of course, it never occurred to me that he was only doing his job, and that if he didn't do it somebody else would. (72)

The bailiff is the scapegoat for the family's frustrated desire for a stable income. His visits cause tempers to fly and, this time around, Booky's mother's comment, "And for two cents I'd go out and get a job myself" (74), results in her parents' "biggest fight ever" (74). Two weeks later "the bailiff caught us red-handed" (75) and the search for a new house is on in chapter eleven.

There is a captionless photograph of a house on page 77. In front of a window with dilapidated shutters stands a girl holding the rope of a sled with two younger children on it. Which house is this? Are the children Bea and her brothers? Presumably it is just a house, one that looks like one of the many houses Booky has lived in. The photograph is from the James Collection in the

City of Toronto Archives. The lack of a caption is baffling; there is nothing self-evident about this photograph other than that it is of a house and that the photograph does not belong to Bernice Thurman Hunter. Why, then, was it chosen? In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag maintains, "Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it" (5). In this case, the reader has no particular reason to doubt Booky's account. The photograph on page 77 does furnish evidence, but it is unclear what it furnishes evidence of. The photograph does not dispel doubt; in fact it causes uncertainty by alerting the reader to another rift in the fictional fabric. Up until this point in the narrative, the photographs have either been Hunter's family photographs or material from the Eaton's Archives, both of which have functioned as a kind of archival/historical substantiation of the setting. As Susan Sontag puts it:

> A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture. (5)

Sontag also discusses the difference between writing, or print, and photographs in conveying knowledge of the past, a curious combination of which is at work in the *Booky* books:

> But print seems a less treacherous form of leaching out the world, of turning it into a mental object, than photographic images, which now provide most of the knowledge people have about the look of the past and the reach of the present. What is written about a person or an event is frankly an interpretation, as are handmade visual statements, like paintings and drawings. Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire. (4)

Booky's narrative gives the reader a sense of daily life by detailing her activities and preoccupations. Her turns of phrase and use of expressions are very aural and add to the written interpretation of her world. For the most part, her use of written images is underscored, rather than undercut, by the use of photographic images, but it is not always clear how these "miniatures of reality" fit into the narrative reality.

On the whole, the placing of photographs in Booky's narrative has a destabilizing effect. Rather than reinforcing the "reality" of the narrative, they open a widening chasm between the written interpretation of a past that belongs to a fictional character, Booky, and an odd collection of photographed pieces that belong to a particular historical era. As someone who has worked in archives, I find myself wanting always more context. Are those photographs really from the 1930s? What are their precise dates? Surely someone knows the stories behind them. As a reader I would be satisfied with fictional captions. The lack of captions disturbs me.[1] How do the pieces of the world presented by the photographs fit into the interpreted world of the narrative? As a scholar I should be delighted: here is a problem I can bend my mind to.

Eileen Conway has also struggled with the issue of the "illustrations" in the *Booky* trilogy. She points out not only that "the pictures are not consistently captioned by Hunter's text" and that the pictures "are not always present or arranged so as to complement, match, or extend our reading of the text" but that, therefore,

> At first sight. . . the text and the illustrations seem almost to have been assembled under two very different impulses: the narrative is apparently controlled by memory of what happened "historically," as a piece of a personal memoir exemplifying and explained by social history; the pictures seem to represent what was more or less accidentally available or interesting to the author from either private family collections or the various public deposits of images. (46)

The feeling that the images were "accidentally available or interesting" adds to the shakiness of the text. The issue is not whether the choice of images was good or bad but rather what the overall effect of their inclusion is. The text stands on its own; the illustrations do not; nor are the two intimately related. They are, rather, incidentally related. As Eileen Conway puts it, "Repeatedly, then, in reading the text and illustrations together, the reader is involved in determining primacy of meaning" (46). Why, then, is there a picture of a run-down house in a chapter called "Our New House"? Is it to show what Booky and her family have the good fortune of leaving behind for a few months, as, for the first time, they don't end up in a house "full of dirt and bedbugs" (78)? Because the Thompsons do not simply move into a different house, they move into "A brand new house!" (79), which makes it all the more unbearable when the bailiff sends them packing again five months later.

The next illustration returns to the now familiar territory of the Eaton's catalogue. Booky's galoshes are worn out and her shoes are "holey and [leak] like sieves. Dad had half-soled them twice already but there was no use doing it again because the toes were scuffed out and my brown ribbed stockings showed through" (89). Booky and her mother take advantage of "Opportunity Day at Eaton's" (90). Both her parents benefit from this break in their grinding routine. Once Booky and her mother get to the shoe department in "The Annex" ("Eaton's bargain store" (96)), Booky falls in love with a pair of fashionable shoes while her mother examines a sturdy, sensible pair:

> The minute I laid eyes on them I knew I had to have them. They were black patent leather with white patent bows and they were absolutely gorgeous. I could see myself in Sunday School swinging my feet out for Mr. Henderson, the Super-

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[1] Captions are used twice in *As Ever*, in pictures relating to Deanna Durbin (30-31, 47) and once in *Hawk and Stretch* to identify "Arthur with Mum" (127). However, neither of these books acknowledges where the photographs are from.

> intendent, to see. (97)

In case the reader has any doubts, there is an advertisement on the following page: "MOTHERS! YOU SHOULD BUY You'll Find These Values Outstanding" (98). The "Black Patent Boudoir Slippers" are clearly a frivolous choice beside the "Sport Oxfords" or the "Snappy Oxfords," even if they are cheaper (in the catalogue). In order to convince her mother, Booky promises, "'I won't run—honest—I'll walk slow and careful all the time'"(99). The astonishing thing is that nobody checks to make sure that the shoes are a good fit. Her mother asks her but neither she nor the salesman feels how her foot fits in the shoe. And Booky is so persuaded by beauty that she has to learn its price the hard way:

> By the time we were on our way home, my feet were killing me. I knew five minutes after I put them on that my beautiful patent-leather slippers were at least two sizes too small. (100)

When her family finally finds out they are furious with her and Bea is not only in pain but also deeply ashamed of herself.

> . . . Mum marched me straight back to Eaton's. She was mad all the way and didn't speak once. I hated that worse than a licking. (103)

Fortunately, they do manage to exchange the shoes and Booky truly appreciates the feel of "a sturdy pair of brown oxfords" (105) that are the right size. And that is the last of the Eaton's catalogue in this book.

The next photograph is not related to the text at all—it is the most "accidental" of the twelve illustrations in this book. It is also from the City of Toronto Archives: a double-page spread of children playing coach and six. It is placed in the middle of a chapter describing the last of the Thompson family's moves, back to Swansea where Booky's mother is from. Booky's description of the street they now live on emphasizes the closeness of the gang of children, most of whom are related somehow: "There must have been twenty of us kids in the middle of the road on unpaved, dead-end Veeny Street" (123). One can easily imagine that the "twenty of us kids" might get up to games like the one in the photograph, but no such game is described, and, again, the lack of a caption leaves the relationship between text and illustration uncertain at best. Eileen Conway refers to this photograph under a mistaken assumption:

> Another instance of the commercial iconography's influence in family snapshots is obvious when we compare the composition of the Eaton's Archive photograph of the Santa Claus parade. . . and its echo in *the family snapshot* of the little boys harnessed to their wagon. . . (49 my emphasis)

While the photograph is quite likely a family snapshot, there is no indication of whose family it belongs to. This photo, like the one of the house, would work better if it were treated as a family snapshot rather than as a fortuitous but disconnected example of children at play. Captions could be used to give these photos significance in the fiction and without diminishing their writerly edge. Carol Shields uses this technique in *The Stone Diaries*. All the photographs are captioned thereby inviting the reader to incorporate them into her reading of the narrative. Shields uses the photographs as part of her fiction and the captions help to amplify the narrative. While they function to make it appear that the story really happened, that the characters really existed, they are not surrounded by the same aura of accident and happen-chance that marks the selection of photographs in the *Booky* books. Because there are no captions to the illustrations in *That Scatterbrain Booky*, and because the photo of the children playing is only obliquely connected to the text proper, the effect of the illustrations is clearly to open questions about the construction of the text rather than closing, or answering, questions.

In *Homesick* there are only pen-and-ink illustrations throughout the text, and these, while they are also not captioned, are clearly grounded in the text. It is clear that Margot Tomes has based her illustrations on details provided by photographs, some of which are supplied by the photographs appended to the narrative. While the illustrations and (captioned) photographs in *Homesick* do open the text, in the sense of marking the connection between "reality" and Fritz's narrative project, there is a greater sense of relation between text and illustration than in *Booky*. The line drawings illustrate the reality of the narrative while the appended photos link Jean's narrative reality to her lived reality. The links and connections between text and illustration in *Booky* are often ambiguous, especially in the final book where there is no acknowlegment made for any of the illustrations (except for the cover photo—not a productive reversal of trends).

The illustration of the 1933 Canadian National Exhibition poster facing the opening of chapter 19, "Kids' day at the Ex," has archival appeal and functions to substantiate the historical setting. What the poster depicts, working men representing power, courage, and faith, has next to nothing to do with Booky's representation of the national exhibition. The poster can, therefore, be seen as a reminder that the exhibition is perceived differently by onlookers and participants, particularly if the onlookers are children. Booky describes one of the more freakish aspects of the exhibition, one of the side shows which claims to exhibit the wonders of the world, one of which is a thirty-six and a half pound midget mother and her two hundred pound son (155). This is one time where a City of Toronto Archives photograph helps to prove the likelihood of the narrative. However, the photo depicts not just two people but a host of exoticized people, both large and small, being "exhibited" (156-57).

The final photograph faces the final page of text. It shows Booky's mother and father (in Sunday clothes?) standing side by side in someone's yard (their own?) with "Billy" (about two years old) perched on a small tricycle. The image works well to substantiate the Thompsons' successes at the close of the book:

> Dad was never out of work again. The humiliations of the pogey and the bread lines, the Star Boxes and the food hampers were all behind him now. . . . And Mum finally got her washing-machine. . . . And she kept her vow about the Annex too. It never saw her again for dust! (179)

Again, the question looms, how closely is the narrative related to the people in the family snapshots? Is the narrative autobiographical fiction or fictional autobiography? Is there a difference? The author's note at the end of the first printing of *That Scatterbrain Booky* provides information but does not answer these questions:

> Bernice says that the idea for *That Scatterbrain Booky* was triggered when she was thinking about the day her brother was born—an event she recalls in vivid detail. Afterwards, many memories came back to her, and she would jot down notes about the "old times" when talking to friends and relatives. Many of the experiences in *Booky* didn't happen exactly as they're portrayed in the story, Bernice says, but they were included because they so clearly give the flavour of growing up in a large city during "the hungry Thirties."

This passage maintains the ambiguous relationship between Bernice and Beatrice, but it also makes clear the author and narrator are related.

The use of family photographs throughout the *Booky* books obviously joins two projects: the narrative interpretation of growing up in the Thirties and the chronicling of that time through visual images. The photographs that don't fit in seamlessly, like the house and the children playing, are like the parts of the narrative that "didn't happen exactly as they are portrayed," whereas the family snapshots add to the homely quality of the narrative: both are accessible and unpretentious and appear to want only to show what the "old times" were like. Their amateurish quality substantiates Sontag's claim that "Recently, photography has become almost as widely practiced an amusement as sex and dancing—which means that, like every mass art form, photography is not practiced by most people as an art" (8).

The "accidental" quality of the illustrations in *Booky* can also be understood as a "making do" with what can be salvaged or what remains of the past, be it memories or photos or, in this case, a combination of both. Sontag's remark applies equally well to Booky's narrative.

> Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself—a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness. It hardly matters what activities are photographed so long as photographs get taken and are cherished. (8)

Booky is a narrative portrait-chronicle of the Thompson family. What connects the various images and events are the family members and the fact that the narrated events are cherished events. The ways in which the narrative is interpreted by the reader will determine not only the meaning of the narrative but also the real effect of such texts in the world.

The slippage between real and fictional worlds not only multiplies narrative interpretations, it heightens our understanding of the role of stories in the world. Rather than offering us the completed, closed and separate kinds of stories that readerly engaging narrative does, writerly engaging narrative gives us stories which seem incomplete, almost as if they were a work-in-progress: stories in which not all the ends are tied up, in which some gaps and puzzles remain, in which allusions are not necessarily predominantly classical or literary, in which something is always left open and in which there is always room for more. Such stories make at least one significant demand on us: they ask us not to compartmentalize fiction and reality in two separate spheres, but rather to understand how they coexist and interact. Not all art need become a mass artform in order for the symbiotic relationship between life and art to be recognized. Thus, books like *Booky*, which challenge us to understand the relation between reality and fiction, between the present and the past, between being engaged and being disengaged, have an effect in the real world, whether it is to increase discussion and to broaden definitions of literary trends and genres or to represent a recognizable life story that will either put readers in touch with their history, their families and themselves, or in some way change their perspective and insight on the familiar, or simply introduce them to an aspect of life they had not known or contemplated before. Even such apparently minor effects can eventually plant the seeds of change, such as the social changes that have taken place between Booky's narrated experiences in the 1930s and the realities of growing up during the 1980s when Bernice Thurman Hunter wrote Booky's stories (and the 1990s in which they continue to be read).

Chapter III
Engaging in childhood: *Homesick* as autobiography.

> "Is that a true story?" "Of course it's true. . . but it may not have happened." (Polacco 8)

> Writing biographies for any age becomes a spiraling process, circling away from oneself, circling back with messages from afar, and all the time circling around one's own autobiography. As long as I can remember, I had wanted to tell my own story directly. Time and again I tried, but I just couldn't find the right voice. I was determined not to write one of those autobiographies that begin with the roster of one's ancestors or a catalogue of one's first memories. I tried to put myself in the third person and to invent a story for myself, but that didn't work either. But when my father died at the age of ninety-six my last link to my childhood was gone, and I felt an urgency to get it all down on paper and make it safe. It was China, really, that I had wanted to capture—the sights, the sounds, the smells of China. America, too—and me in the midst, feeling all of it. I could see the story line of my own life, and if this had been a biography of someone else I wouldn't have tinkered with the time sequence or with some of the minor facts. But this was *my* story; I could do with it what I pleased. So I labeled the book "fiction," and by tinkering with it and telescoping twelve years into one I felt that I had a more unified book, one that felt more emotionally true to me than if I had carved it up into years. I called the book *Homesick: My Own Story* . I was amazed by how memory hidden for fifty years could turn up as fresh as ever, yet filled with surprises that had never quite surfaced before. And at long last I had a chance to pour out my love for my two countries, China and America. (Fritz "The Teller and the Tale" 40-1)

Homesick is a narrative that explores both what children know and what we can know about childhood through autobiographical narratives. Jean Fritz's autobiography does not quite fit any of the definitions of that genre because her narrative is written for children and, more significantly, because it is narrated, in its entirety, by a child. Because her memories and feelings are presented from the perspective of twelve-year-old Jean, the narrative explores what she knows and what she wants to know as a child. Because the narrative focus is entirely twelve-year-old Jean's, the reader becomes engaged in the specifics of her world and experiences and thereby comes to know about her childhood from the particular vantage-point of her autobiographical narrative of childhood. The autobiographical narrative is one of the forms suited to stories about development narrated in the first-person. The tension between the narrator and the narratee, and in this case the implied reader, is heightened because autobiography reveals the "truth", to some degree. The story being told is not "just" a story; it is an attempt to express the salient moments of lived experience in the narrator's "real" life. Because *Homesick* is written in immediate-engaging-first-person narration, which attempts to make readers feel that they are part of the narrative action and emotion—or, as Aidan Chambers puts it, turns the implied reader into an *implicated* reader—and in which the narrator is narrating events that have taken place in the immediate past, it points to a number of important links between theories of autobiography in relation to narratives of childhood and the use of immediate-engaging-first-person narration.

I will begin by discussing an important theme in *Homesick*, the interrelation between childhood and knowledge. This theme is central to my discussion of *Homesick* as autobiography. *Homesick* explores what Jean knows, her awareness of what she doesn't know, and her creation of a story of her own about where she belongs which is deconstructed by the book's subtitle: *My Own Story*. The discussion of this theme takes the place of the close reading of the first chapter of the novel that is I undertake in chapters II and IV. In effect, the story Jean creates, or makes up for herself, which I call the Myth of America, is undone by the story of her lived experience. However, the relationship between these two stories is left for the reader to intuit because the immediate-engaging narrator only tells the stories, she does not discuss their meaning or significance. Because *Homesick* is Jean's "own story" I examine it as an autobiography, and consider some definitions of autobiography as well as the pitfalls of definition, with particular reference to Philippe Lejeune. I also consider the interrelation of truth and fiction with regard to self-representation, Richard Coe's theory of the childhood, and issues pertinent to women's autobiography and their connection to the autobiography of childhood, as outlined by Sidonie Smith. My thesis is, again, that what we can know about childhood is radically different in immediate-engaging-first-person narration because of the lack of narrative distance and the voice and perspective of the child narrator. If the reader's level of engagement is full, if she becomes "implicated" in the narrative, then she can participate in the narrator's childhood in a way that enables the narrative's emotional truth to resonate in the reader's own life as well. This last statement is abstract and imprecise because emotional truth is not only difficult to measure, it depends on, and therefore varies according to, each reader. Nevertheless, it can be a profound source of knowledge.

Writing Childhood: *Homesick* and the Myth of America

Jean's narrative explores both what she knows as a child and what the reader can know about her childhood through her autobiographical immediate-engaging narration. Jean's knowledge is limited because as a child she is excluded from adult knowledge and power and because, as the only child of American missionaries working in China, she is isolated from family, community and country. Richard Coe maintains that:

> Almost without exception, the man or woman who, later in life, returns in imagination to revisit and re-create a

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> past childhood was, in that childhood, a solitary, an alienated, an exceptional child. Not necessarily lonely, but in all essential ways, conscious of being alone. (55)

The sense of aloneness is very strong in Jean's narrative. Her narrative centers on the time of the Chinese revolution in 1925-27. Not only is Jean a "foreign devil" in China, she is an outsider in the British School where her keen sense of American nationalism makes her chafe at Britishness. As the violence of the revolution increases, Jean finds herself more and more alone. Her best American friend moves to Shanghai; her baby sister dies a few weeks after she is born and her mother spends the summer in bed recovering from phlebitis and emotional strain; the British school closes down; and eventually Jean is confined to the house because the streets have become too dangerous. As a child, she attempts to reconcile her isolated and unempowered position in China by creating a story for herself about a place where she has an extended family, where she can move about with relative freedom in a community that includes her peers, rather than being isolated and alone, and where she assumes she will fit in with the larger population of the country.

Jean's narrative is predominantly the story of her life in Hankow, China, and her longing for America, the "home" she has never seen. Jean's favorite story, during these years, is the Myth of America. The story of America achieves mythic stature in Jean's mind because it is so completely different from what she knows from her own experience. In *China Homecoming* she summarizes the predicament her narrative in *Homesick* explores:

> When I was a child, my parents were always talking about "home." They meant America, of course, which sounded so wonderful I couldn't understand why they had ever left it. Why had they traveled halfway around the world to China to have me and then just stayed on, talking about "home?" . . . . I had never picked a blackberry in my life. I had never peeled an apple. Somehow, living on the opposite side of the world as I did, I didn't feel like a real American. (7)

The Myth of America is part of Jean's attempt to empower herself as she tries to negotiate the fact of living in one place and feeling like she belongs to another. In simple terms, the place she was born and lives in is Hankow while her family's home is in Washington, P. A. Yet once she is "home" in America, she is forced to recognize that Hankow also defines her sense of self. Places are more concrete than origins, or, an individual's perception of where he comes from and thus belongs. Ultimately, however, the two must work together to fully explain or determine one's identity. Identity can be explained, in part, as the interdependence of personal experiences in physical places and the process of aligning one's relationship to those places in terms of one's place in one's own family mythology. Jean's family mythology is all-American (or so she thinks until her Grandmother refers to her Scotch ancestry toward the end of the book), and so she considers her origins to be all-American. However, as she struggles to reconcile her experiences of place in both China and America, she eventually recognizes that place has a bearing on her sense of home even as her sense of home has a bearing on place. Being American influences her experiences in China as much as China influences her experiences in America. Both places are integral to her sense of identity and play a role in the drama of her self-definition and self-reconstruction; Paul Eakin identifies self-definition and self-reconstruction as an active part of the autobiographical process. The Myth of America, then, sustains her through her twelve years in China, but ultimately proves to be largely unsustainable. The myth is an important aspect of her narration because it shapes her perception of who she is and her relation to the worlds she lives in.

In a sense, Jean lives in three separate worlds; two are real, one is mythic. The first of these is the restricted world of the French and British concessions—or divisions—in the city of Hankow. The concessions are an anomaly; they belong to a non-Chinese kind of living—a world of "solemn and orderly" buildings "with little plots of grass around them" (20). This world is small and powerful, yet is also unstable—it is the world of a western culture which has imposed itself on another nation. As an American, Jean fits into this world as a member of the foreign population in Hankow, although, because the Americans don't have a concession, she is subject to British law and order. The second world she lives in is the larger and dominant Chinese world which is positively manifested for Jean in the form of her amah,[1] Lin Nai-Nai, and in the omnipresence of the Yangtze River. Compared to the concessions, this world is a jumble of people, livestock and wares (21). The interactions between these two worlds exposes Jean to racism, poverty, injustice, and war. The third world Jean lives in is the mythical world of America. This world is, in part, a reaction against the first two and is Jean's promised land. Although she has never been there, it is the world she prefers. Her vision of America is predominantly fabricated out of family reminiscences and correspondence with the folks back "home" in Washington, P. A. The stories of life on her grandmother's farm become intermingled with a glowing sense of patriotism and a devoted sense of national identity. As a child, Jean is an enthusiastic believer in the myth of the land of the brave and the home of the free. Her love and devotion to America are amplified by her status as an absentee national.

Jean's childhood is characterized by apartness, by difference. Her narrative opens by describing her sense of dislocation and the centrality of the Myth of America to her sense of identity:

> In my father's study there was a large globe with all the countries of the world running around it. I could put my finger on the exact spot where I was and had been ever since I'd been born. And I was on the wrong side of the globe. I was in China in a city named Hankow, a dot on a crooked line that seemed to break the country right in two. The line was really the Yangtse River, but who would know

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> by looking at a map what the Yangtse River really was? (9)

One gets the impression that Jean often contemplates the injustice of being on the wrong side of the globe. During her first twelve years in China, Jean is very conscious, and proud, of her identity as an American and her loyalty to her idea of what this identity means fuels her sense of dislocation. Although Jean is deeply attached to the place in which she was born, she feels removed from it by the knowledge of her ties to the other side of the world—that is, by what she, at this point, conceives as her origins. Her dislocation is succinctly captured in the italicized sections of narrative that relate the exchange of information, thoughts and desire between Jean and her grandmother:

> *Twenty-five fluffy little yellow chicks hatched from our*
> *eggs today, my grandmother wrote.*
> *I wrote my grandmother that I had watched a Chinese*
> *magician swallow three yards of fire.* (9)

Jean yearns for the ordinariness of life on her Grandmother's farm—a place where the birth of chicks is as miraculous as the swallowing of fire. "The trouble with living on the wrong side of the world" says Jean, "was that I didn't feel like a *real* American" (10). Jean assumes that by moving to the "right" side she will feel like a real American. This hope is ultimately undone and with it her myth of America.

The undoing of her myth is foreshadowed by the knowledge that she can never be president because she was born in the "wrong" place. The idea of being a real American is dependent on having been born in the "right" place:

> I didn't want to be president; I wanted to be a writer. Still,
> why should there be a *law* saying that only a person born
> in the United States could be president? It was as if I
> wouldn't be American enough. (10)

This law suggests that being born of American parents is not enough—that one's experience of place functions as a validation of one's belonging. Jean is angry because the law does not acknowledge people's feelings or loyalties—it remains stolidly pragmatic.

Jean's desire to exclude her familiarity with the dual world of Hankow from a definition of who she is is a desire to simplify the complexity of the larger world and her relation to it. By simplifying the world of her experience, Jean is able to create a kind of fantasy world where she feels more in control. Her experiences in Hankow have made her conscious of the workings of colonial power—a consciousness which is complicated by a lack of knowledge. She lacks knowledge because her parents refuse to inform her on some key issues, even when she questions them. When she asks why the Americans have gun boats on the river her father answers, "Just in case. That's all he'd say" (20). The complexity of these levels of knowledge and denial are well illustrated by Jean's determination to be a true American patriot. She carries her determination to the point that she feels like a traitor for singing "God Save the King" at the British school she attends. When Jean asks her mother to write her an excuse so that she won't have to sing the anthem, her mother's response is, "When in Rome. . . do as the Romans do" (10). Predictably, Jean is annoyed that her mother views this important matter purely in terms of Jean stirring up trouble. Eventually she realizes what bothers her most; her parents expect her, as a child, to obey different codes of conduct than they set for themselves:

> If my mother and father were really and truly in Rome, they wouldn't do what the Romans did at all. They'd probably try to get the Romans to do what they did, just as they were trying to teach the Chinese to do what Americans did. (My mother even gave classes in American manners.) (10)

She recognizes that her parents' motive for being in China is "to teach the Chinese to do what Americans did"(10). She also recognizes the power the foreign population in Hankow has to regulate the way things are done within their concessions. The British, for example, have put up a sign on their most prized street, The Bund, "NO DOGS, NO CHINESE" (21). Jean resents the injustice of this sign because she knows it is racist. Nevertheless, her disparagement of the British and her championing of the American shows that she does not fully recognize that the presence of both these countries in Hankow is to protect similar interests.

Jean's Myth of America is premised on personal freedom for all and the rights of the individual, two things she does not have in Hankow where she is kept in check by two kinds of repression. The first is her lack of social connections and personal freedom, which is due to her precarious position as a "foreign devil" during the Chinese Revolution. The second is her parents' refusal to provide her with information and knowledge; in their attempt to protect her from the hardcore facts of an adult world they only succeed in making her feel powerless and angry. The Myth of America is empowering because, even though it is based on faulty knowledge, Jean posits a world where everyone gets along, where all people can come and go as they please, and where everyone belongs. At the center of Jean's ideal world is her grandmother; her grandmother's farm expands the limits of this world to include family and friends, and, in turn, the world of the farm is encompassed by the larger world of America.

The image of her grandmother's farm and its routine predictability is Jean's pastoral haven and saving grace. Whenever Jean is overwhelmed by the politics of the world and the grief and violence that result from the revolution, she wishes herself away to a "safe place"—which is, invariably, her Grandmother's farm:

> *Oh, Grandma, I thought, why can't I be there with you? I'd feed the chickens for you. I'd pump water from the well, the way my father used to do.* (13)

Although Jean has never seen her Grandma, she is always the figure Jean conjures up for comfort. Her Grandmother is the kernel of truth at the center of Jean's Myth of America.

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prefers to cry over *Sarah Crewe* than to shed tears for herself. When her mother is in the hospital, for reasons no one quite explains to her, she escapes into the world of the Bobbsey Twins so that she can pretend that life is just "one good time after another and nothing ever [goes] very wrong" (68). Jean is in the habit of comparing her life to the content in books or to the experience of reading. For instance, she describes the upheaval of the revolution as scary but "also hazy, like the passages in a book that you just skim over" (55). When the realities of the revolution are unavoidable, her whole family enjoys speculating about "what people in Washington, P. A., talked about at the end of the day" (89), which reinforces Jean's Myth of America. The topics they come up with are the weather, sports and the length of skirts. "We all laughed. Suddenly it seemed both wonderful and funny to have nothing more than a frost to worry about" (89).

When Jean finally steps onto the deck of the *President Taft* and into the story she has imagined for years, she is sure of herself and of her story. The first surprise comes as the boat pulls out of Shanghai; Jean has the "strange feeling" that she isn't "moving away at all. Instead the land was slowly moving away and leaving me" (121). Jean realizes that she has been so caught up in expecting the future that she has undervalued the present that has now quite tangibly become her past and, like the land, is moving away from her.

The advantage of being on a boat on the ocean is that she cannot identify being in a particular place:

> I was smack in the middle of no place, I thought. Not in China, not in America, not in the past, not in the future. In between everything. It was nice. (125)

The vastness of Jean's whole world comes into focus at the height of her "in between" feeling—floating between the two continents of her origins. When Jean crosses the international dateline, her "in-between" feeling disappears; she is excited to be sharing the same day with her grandmother, but, by the same token, she feels as if she and Lin Nai-Nai had "suddenly been tossed on different planets" (127). The distance between her Chinese world and her American world is symbolically marked by the imaginary line that assigns each of these worlds a separate day. In turn, the idea of Jean's worlds spanning the international dateline underlines the naiveté of her expectations of being completely at home in America. Even though she has been warned that there is more to America than feeding her grandmother's chickens, Jean expects, based on her naive and wholehearted acceptance of the Myth of America, that she is leaving her feelings of dislocation behind her in Hankow and that she will become part of a unified culture and place upon her arrival in America.

In her article "Crossing the Pacific to America: The Uses of Narrative", Virginia Walter claims that Jean finds America to be "as she expected it to be" and that "There is no initial disillusionment for her" (66). While I grant that Jean does not find America foreign or strange, I do not agree that Jean experiences no initial disillusionment—although perhaps disbelief is the better term to describe Jean's reaction upon her arrival. While her myth is by no means immediately

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destroyed it does not account for Jean's uncomfortable awareness that America is just another country with its own set of bureaucratic regulations:

> Believe it or not, after crossing thousands of miles of ocean to get here, we had to prove that it was O. K. for us to come into the USA. . .that we were. . . not spies. . .[or] smuggling. . . anything. . . illegal. . . [and] that we were germ-free. (131)

After the long ordeal at customs Jean expects to "feel one-hundred-percent American", but instead

> *I felt dizzy and unreal, as if I were a made-up character in a book I had read too many times to believe it wasn't still a book.* (131)

Jean has nurtured both the Myth of America and the story of her arrival so carefully and for so long that she finds it next to impossible to untangle the threads of what is real and what is story. As a result, the unexpected turns of events—the realities that do not figure in Jean's myth—stand out quite starkly.

Fortunately, her Grandma and the farm are as wonderful and reliable as Jean imagined them. Being in America isn't the real issue; being home is. If, as Virginia Walter states, "For Jean, America is home" (66), then it is home because that is where her family is. She doesn't need to be shown around the farm because "I found everything so familiar I didn't need to be told what was what" (139). And when she runs into her grandmother's arms the first time, she does it "as if [she]'s been doing this every day" (138). Virginia Walters is partially right: Jean is not completely disillusioned—the heart of her myth is unshaken.

Nevertheless, there is more to America than feeding her grandma's chickens, and a lot of it is unpleasant. Jean had always thought that an American school would solve all her problems:

> I'd be an American in a class with nothing but Americans in it. When we fought the American Revolution, we'd all fight on the same side. When we sang "My country 'tis of thee," we'd yell our heads *off*. We'd all be the same. I would *belong*. (125)

Instead of making Jean feel like she belongs, the folk in Washington P. A. eye her with a certain amount of suspicion. Did she eat rats in China? Her new teacher tells the class that she lived beside the "Yangs-Ta-Zee River" and will not stand to be corrected (148). Jean is confronted with the same narrow-minded outlook she encountered in Hankow. The words of her British teacher, "it is the national anthem we sing here," are replaced by her American teacher's "In America we say Yangs-Ta-Zee". The boy behind her chants "Chink, Chink Chinaman" (149); a woman in church ascertains: "You can tell she wasn't born in this country" (144). Jean would dearly like to know what makes it so obvious that she was born elsewhere. Finally, Jean's vision of "liberty for all" is shattered when she discovers that the infamous Palmer method of writing (which advocates keeping your fingers and wrist still while you write with the fleshy underside of your forearm) is forced, not only on her, but on every student across the country.

Although Jean's myth is effectively exploded, she can accept the fact that the country as a whole is mot one-hundred-percent perfect because her Grandma functions as a figure of reconciliation. Jean learns about the basic necessities of a household and a farm—the work taken care of by coolies in China—and this knowledge makes her feel included in the adult world. Her Grandma loves her unequivocally and does not burden her with reminders to be good, whereas her mother wants her to try to be one-hundred-percent perfect and to behave as fits her age. Her Grandma provides her with security and comfort by making her feel needed as a member of the family, rather than worrying about her behavior as a representative of the family. Grandma has a sense of humor about the absurdities of the world, like the Palmer method, and freely admits that the world is a funny place, "Maybe even a little crazy. There are times when people just *have* to laugh" (159). And finally, she helps Jean to get over her misguided fantasy of being like everybody else, especially in view of the fact that Jean wants to be a writer. She tells her: "Writers do more than just fit in. Sometimes they don't fit in at all" (147).

Writers often don't fit in because they articulate truths about the world that make people uncomfortable. Jean's immediate-engaging-first-person narrative explicitly describes the frustrations, anger and confusion of a child trying to make sense of the adult world and trying to come to terms with her place in it. Throughout her autobiographical narrative Jean is most strikingly isolated by her lack of knowledge and by her sense of otherness. Jean knows enough to be painfully aware of what she does not know and to realize that her identity hinges on an impossible ideal—she can never be a "real" American as defined by her Myth of America. *Homesick* articulates the hopes and difficulties of the immigrant experience—the fallacies in the myth of the promised land. By the end of her narrative, it is apparent that Jean will be forced to outgrow her cherished Myth of America; however, her disappointment is tempered by the knowledge that her place—her home—is with her Grandma.

Homesick as Autobiography

Although *Homesick* is an autobiography, according to Philippe Lejeune's "autobiographical pact," Jean Fritz has taken the precaution of calling it fiction. Philippe Lejeune defines the autobiographical pact by an act of referentiality. If the author, narrator and protagonist are identical, a fact that is verified by their name, then the narrative can be called autobiography. "It is in the *proper name* that person and discourse are linked even before being joined in the first person" (11). Not only is Jean both the author and the narrator-protagonist, in her "Foreword" to the narrative proper she states:

> the events are drawn from the entire period of my childhood, but they are all, except in minor details, basically true. The people are real people; the places are dear to me. But most important, the form I have used has given me the freedom to recreate the emotions that I remember so vividly. Strictly speaking, I have to call this book *fiction*, but it does not feel like fiction to me. It is my story, told as truly as I can tell it.

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JEAN FRITZ
Dobbs Ferry, New York
January 11, 1982

While this explanation gestures at putting the debate between truth and fiction to rest, it creates more questions than answers. How do facts and emotional truth correspond? How much fiction slips into "true stories"? What does fiction feel like? How does it differ from a non-fictional story? *Homesick* is a compelling example of the need for theoreticians and writers of genre poetics to look further afield than "adult" narratives for, as Susan Fraiman reminds us in *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and The Novel of Development* :

> genre criticism plays a key role in canon formation both by policing individual categories and by maintaining hierarchical relationships among categories; . . . it regulates not only which texts we read but also, by alerting us to some elements over others, how we are able to read them. (x)

Homesick is a book that problematizes the assumptions made about autobiography, particularly because the existing theory assumes that adults are always the narrators of childhood experiences, unless the narrative has been written by a child.

Jean Fritz's *Homesick: My Own Story* is an autobiography written through a child narrator, and it circulates as a children's book. It calls the standard definition of autobiography into question. Autobiography, as Wallace Martin defines it in *Recent Theories of Narrative* , is a narrative in which "someone describes the personal significance of past experiences from the perspective of the present" (75). In other words, the writing "I" is present in the narrative as well as the written "I." The writer's written reflections, at the time of writing, on his past self are a necessary component of the autobiographical narrative. Thus the self is not only reconstructed in the writing, but is also, in some sense, a result of the writing process.

This definition does not describe the autobiographical narrative format adopted by a number of children's writers because they do not comment overtly about their past child selves. The autobiographer's understanding of who she is now has to be conveyed implicitly in her representation of who she was then in order to show the process of her development, or becoming, rather than commenting explicitly on how the past shaped her present. Autobiography written through a child narrator, and in immediate-engaging-first-person narration, leaves no room for vacillation in voice and perspective because reactions to situations, dialogue, representations of conflict, reasoning, and responses to the workings of an adult world must all be reconstructed according to the age and situation of the narrator. Any adult reflections must become part of the characterization of the child narrator. Thus the self that results from the writing process is the child self, a self who might be said to have a fictional edge of clarity that the author herself could not have had in quite that way when she was a child. I say "fictional" edge of clarity because that is the gift the adult author gives to her readers by virtue of the hindsight and reflection that affect the shaping of both her narrator and narrative.

In his lecture "Re-cognizing the Adolescent in Fiction" (Edmonton AB, Oct. 1995), Aidan Chambers explained the phenomenon of a protagonist's extraordinary perceptive powers by reminding us that "It doesn't matter that a person can't think what a protagonist does. We believe it as we read it and this is how we progress." In other words, the fictional edge of clarity bestowed on the child narrator may not be an historical fact, but it is an accepted literary convention. The self as child narrator of autobiography is doubly reconstructed because there are two layers of construction: (1) the self as child, which replaces the "normal" reconstruction of the self, (2) the adult reflections which the child could not have had but which can be worked into the fictive persona of the narrator, in lieu of direct ironic retrospective commentary by the narrating agent. Thus, Jean Fritz, the "I" writing, cannot be a direct presence in her narrative because she has chosen to tell her story as though she were still a child. This results in what I described as a blended voice in chapter II. Her adult voice must be either effaced or effectively disguised as that of a ten to twelve year old. The disguise is less likely to work with more experienced readers as, for example, in the following passage:

> Then I went out to the kitchen to see if Yang Sze-Fu, the cook, would give me something to eat. I found him reading a Chinese newspaper, his eyes going up and down with the characters. (Chinese words don't march across flat surfaces the way ours do; they drop down cliffs, one cliff after another from right to left across a page.) (18)

The parenthetical comment is evidence of the implied author. It is one of several explanatory moments in Jean's narrative that recognize that her intended audience, presumably primarily young Americans, is quite likely unfamiliar with basic cultural details about China. The explanations use vivid images to describe cultural differences and details of setting.

While they are not meant to disrupt the reader's level of engagement they do run that risk, because *Homesick*'s narrator is doubly reconstructed. Fritz has to adapt her reflections on her childhood self to suit the self she is reconstructing so that they will sound like the plausible interpretations of a twelve-year-old, and, therefore, the narrator's voice is a blend of the focalizer and the implied author

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Definitions of Autobiography

The desire to name and classify is rarely satisfactorily filled unless there is an infallible formula to follow, an unlikely factor when one is dealing with literature. Philippe Lejeune's definition of autobiography and his description of the "autobiographical pact" is still the most cited, yet even he has revisited his earlier work and comments on the pitfalls of definiton:

> In my mind the definition was a point of departure from which to set up an analytical deconstruction of the factors that enter into the perception of the genre. But, isolated from its context, cited as an "authority," it could appear sectarian and dogmatic, a derisory Procustean bed, a falsely magical formula that blocks reflection instead of stimulating it. (121)

Lejeune's definition is as follows:

> *Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality.* (4)

To further clarify this definition, Lejeune cites a number of elements belonging to four categories in order to be able to distinguish "[g]enres closely related to autobiography" such as memoirs, biography, personal novel, autobiographical poem, journal/diary, and the self portrait or essay (4) from bona fide autobiography. *Homesick* conforms to all of the elements in Lejeune's four categories[1], but it does not meet one crucial element of the definition: it is not retrospective. Naturally, it is retrospective in actual fact; however, the narrator is not the adult reflecting back. In "The Known and the Unknown: An Exploration into Nonfiction", Fritz underlines the overlap in narrative technique in fiction and biography:

> Just because the action takes place in a known past is no excuse for depriving the reader of a sense of the Unknown which is part of every life, no matter when it is lived. Biographers must preserve a sense of immediacy and proceed into the futures of their characters' lives as fiction writers do, as if they were unexplored territory. (172)

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[1] The four categories are:

1. *Form of language*
    - a. narrative
    - b. in prose
2. *Subject treated* : individual life, story of a personality
3. *Situation of the author* : the author (whose name refers to a real person) and narrator are identical
4. *Position of the narrator*
    - a. the narrator and the principal character are identical
    - b. retrospective point of view of the narrative (4)

Evidently Fritz has adopted this same philosophy in writing her autobiography. Jean's is a foreward looking narrative despite the fact that for Fritz, the author, the writing is based on retrospection.

In my quest for a definition of the autobiography, I have found one that I consider ideal. Of course it has a flaw: it is a definition of "memoir." In *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, editor William Zinsser explains that for the purposes of a series of talks,

> "Memoir" was defined as some portion of a life. Unlike autobiography, which moves in a dutiful line from birth to fame, omitting nothing significant, memoir assumes the life and ignores most of it. The writer of a memoir takes us back to a corner of his or her life that was unusually vivid or intense—childhood, for instance—or that was framed by unique events. By narrowing the lens, the writer achieves a focus that isn't possible in autobiography; memoir is a window into a life. (21)

Why not just use the term memoir, then? Because I am reluctant to give up the term autobiography for fear of losing admission to the larger arena of the discussion of autobiography. I would prefer to call *Homesick* an autobiography of childhood because that implies focus, intensity, boundaries and part of a life, as well as upholding the questions about childhood knowledge and what we can know about childhood through autobiographical narrative. Another point of consideration is that "memoir" and "memoirs" are too easily confused as terms. Memoirs is both the plural of memoir and a genre of its own.[1]

The fact is that a memoir, as Zinsser defines it, allows for a wide range of possibility as the memoirs in *Inventing the Truth* attest. Futhermore, if a written childhood qualifies as a memoir, that does not disqualify it as an autobiography of childhood. In "Autobiography and Literary History," Lejeune again comments at length on the pitfalls of definition with regard to genre:

> The genre becomes a sort of "club" of which the critic makes himself the guardian, selecting with the help of exclusions a relatively pure "race." If the criteria are too precise, we run the risk of schematizing the "horizons of expectation," of being blind to related phenomena and to historical evolution. (150)

What I propose is that the Autobiography Club now admit minors, or narratives not necessarily narrated by adults nor necessarily chronicling a life from "birth to fame." Or, to put it another way, the Autobiography Club, which has so far exclusively accepted distant-engaging and distancing narrators as members, should now be opened to immediate-engaging-first-person narrators.

I am advocating a greater pluralism on what is probably the one clear factor in the definition of autobiography, the retrospection of the narrator, his *present* perspective on the past. Why do I suggest that this one clear defining feature be blurred? First, because this feature does not cease to be the case in actual fact, it just doesn't necessarily show up in the narrative. And, second, because it will allow the admission of deserving new members to the Club, members who will add a range and variety of ways in which the autobiography of childhood is conceived, written and read. When Jean's narrative ends, she is still twelve, but her narrative has related an integral autobiographical experience. Fritz wrote her childhood story for children. She opted not to privilege the voice of the adult and "By narrowing the lens, [she] achieves a focus that isn't possible in autobiography" (Zinsser 21) as it is currently defined. The focus, in this case, hinges on Jean's voice as a child, a voice that pulls truth and fiction together in the establishment of character, a voice that privileges immediacy over hindsight.

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[1] Memoirs typically recount the events of a given historical period. The writer need not have been directly involved in them. Memoirs do not meet Lejeune's four categories because the subject treated is not the authors individual life or the story of her personality.

Truth, Fiction and the Self in Time

Adults cannot escape the fact that they were once children. The child by turns anticipates and dreads attaining adulthood, yet cannot avoid attaining it barring death. However, the autobiographer of childhood appears to do in writing what she couldn't do in real life: stop the inevitable progress of time. This leaves readers with the implication of the protagonist's growing up without telling it. Ending the narrative prior to the attainment of adulthood is a distinguishing feature of many, but not all, autobiographies of childhood written for children. This is not an evasion of the truth, and it may be the fulfillment of a fantasy. Lejeune cites Vapereau's comments on his definition of autobiography in *Dictionnaire universel des litteratures* , 1876, which Lejeune feels "must make any adherent in the strict sense shiver:"

> Autobiography leaves a lot of room to fantasy, and the one who is writing is not at all obliged to be exact about the facts, as in memoirs, or to tell the full and complete truth, as in confessions. (123)

Why not take inspiration from Vapereau's largesse? If autobiography does not have to tell the complete truth or to be exact about the facts, then why insist that it must detail an author's adult years? The narrative of childhood can still be autobiography, even if the omission of the adult years makes it incomplete. Accepting this proposition means stretching the conventions that currently define the genre of autobiography. I favor this to calling autobiographical narratives of childhood a sub-genre of autobiography, because childhood is an integral part of life, not a subordinate part. Furthermore, admitting childhood narratives to the genre allows for the addition of subsequent instalments at a later date, although it does not require them.

The element of "fantasy" in autobiographical narratives is a factor that the critic vainly tries to identify and distinguish from factual elements. Paul John Eakin points out in *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* that we are more than willing to accept an autobiographical element in fiction but that, "The presence of fiction in autobiography. . . tends to make us uneasy, for we instinctively feel that autobiography is—or ought to be—precisely not fiction" (9). So what is one to do with a text that purports to be autobiography and novel, that is to say "real" life and fiction? This matter is further complicated by Sidonie Smith's explanation, in *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, that the fictiveness of the narrating self is a result of the relationship between the writer and the written. She says that "Because the autobiographer can never capture the fullness of her subjectivity or understand the entire range of her experience, the narrative 'I' becomes a fictive persona" (46). But does this fictive persona negate the truth of the narrative? Truth is, of course, precisely the kind of loaded term that brings all sorts of problems to the fore, especially in discussing a text that has been categorized as an autobiographical novel.

The self is a varying blend of truth and fiction. In a chapter entitled "Self-Invention in Autobiography: The Moment of Language," Eakin suggests that for many writers "The fictive nature of selfhood. . . is held to be a biographical fact" (182); that is to say that, because stories are so much a part of who they are, fiction is a marker of their very selves. Or to put it another and more general way, we are the stories we tell about ourselves and these stories contain a kernel of truth whether or not it can be clearly identified. Ultimately, people tell stories to make sense of their lives and of their place in the world. Melvin Konner claims that the "impact of narrative" is "perhaps the most important and general of all distorters of memory." However,

> psychologists, the scientists of memory. . . have decided that building a coherent narrative of our lives is so important that it outweighs the disadvantages of selectivity and even of inaccuracy. . . . If we can construct a story that makes good sense to us, the story itself will have healing power, regardless of how well it reflects the absolute factual truth. (408-09)

In the face of the difficulty of reconciling past life experience and memory with truth and the power of story, how do we sort out the intricacies of autobiographical narrative? Part of the answer rests on how we understand the relation between the self and language and another part of the answer rests on how we define "the past". Paul John Eakin suggests that language has the power,

> to create one of the most enduring of human illusions: if autobiographical discourse encourages us to place self before language, cart before horse, the fact of our readiness to do so suggests that the power of language to fashion selfhood is not only successful but life-sustaining, necessary to the conduct of human life as we know it. Some such belief as this seems to me to be intrinsic to the performance of the autobiographical act. (191)

Part of the way we understand ourselves is through our knowledge of the past and how we stand in relation to it. However, our understanding of the past is shaped by language. Language fashions not only our selfhood but our history.

The writing of social history has a number of points in common with the writing of personal history. The majority of Jean Fritz's books are works of historical fiction or biographies. Fritz stresses the importance of "*people* doing things" (86), their acts and involvement, rather than just of the events themselves. In her article, "The Very Truth," Jean Fritz insists that writing history means writing about all people, the ordinary and the mighty, and that emotional details are important. Nevertheless, she recognizes that history is often being compromised for one reason or another:

> The trouble is that for political, economic, and various other indefensible reasons we are watering down history by either leaving people out of the story or by depicting them in only the simplest and most general terms. In ancient Greece, the opposite of the word for *truth* was not *falsehood* but *oblivion*. If it is not from oblivion that we need to rescue the characters of our past, it is from some place almost as indistinct. (83-4)

The way I understand Fritz's point is this: if the binary opposite of truth is not falsehood but oblivion, or the state of being forgotten, then the meaning of truth becomes quite different because it is opposed to nothing rather than to another story. In other words, truth, in a sense, is all or nothing, rather than one thing or another. Of course, false information is one way of causing "true" information to be forgotten by the simple act of replacement. I think Fritz's point here is that by writing history with a view towards recording events, rather than describing the activities of ordinary people, we are forgetting what really matters about our past. Another way of saying this, in narrative terms, is that a plot can't function without characters, and, despite what Aristotle claims about the supremacy of plot, it is the human plight of the characters that affects us most deeply. Thus, in autobiography we hope to find out not only the course of events that mark the author's life, but what makes those events significant emotionally and intellectually. How do they affect the author's personality?

The distinction between truth and oblivion is equally important in writing a self-life-history, or autobiography; one can equate truth with telling, even if it is only a partial telling, and oblivion with not telling, in an absolute sense. What matters is that the autobiographer aims to tell a truth so that the life-story will not be completely sucked into the vacuum of oblivion and accepts that telling the truth is complicit with some emotions and the telling of some falsehoods, or fictions. Thus, although "'the very truth' is at best only a partial truth" (Fritz 81) and although "there is no way tell 'the very truth' about people. . . there is little value to any truth if one doesn't try" (Fritz 86). By writing her autobiography, then, Fritz rescues not only her own life from oblivion, but also the lives of those around her—the characters from her past. One might object that in so doing, she also misrepresents their lives by putting them in primary relation to her own, but I would counter that that is to be expected; it is part of the point-of-view in an I-centered story because the narrator-protagonist is both the focus and the focalizer of the narrative and everything and everyone stands in relation to her. Being rescued from oblivion in this manner doesn't guarantee accurate representation but it can place lives into new contexts and so give them new meaning, which is basically what the process of writing autobiography is all about.

Coe's theory of the Childhood

Homesick was written by an adult, but it is narrated by a child, and, furthermore, by a child who is not "grown up" by the end of the narrative. Richard Coe, to my knowledge, is the only critic who has written an extensive study of the "childhood" as an autobiographical form. He defines it thus:

> *an extended piece of writing, a conscious, deliberately executed literary artifact, usually in prose* (and thus intimately related to the novel) *but not excluding occasional experiments in verse, in which the most substantial portion of the material is directly autobiographical, and whose structure reflects step by step the development of the writer's self; beginning often, but not invariably, with the first light of consciousness, and concluding quite specifically, with the attainment of a precise degree of maturity.* The last element in the definition is among the most essential. The formal literary structure is complete exactly at the point at which the immature self of childhood is conscious of its transformation into the mature self of the adult who is the narrator of the earlier experiences. (8-9)

Homesick lacks the final and, according to Coe, most essential element. Nevertheless, *Homesick* is clearly a "deliberately executed literary artifact", and "the most substantial portion of the material is autobiographical." So, how does one reconcile the authority of Coe's definition with the deviations from it evident in Fritz's text? One might simply list the obvious exceptions to Coe's definition evidenced in texts with child narrators. But I take issue with Coe for more than just this one definition; I object to how he defines "the Childhood" and also to his entire view of what childhood is.

In *When the Grass Was Taller*, Richard Coe makes a case for the Childhood as a distinct form of autobiography. However, the written Childhood, in Coe's parameters, does not include a Childhood written entirely through a child narrator. In his conclusion, Coe makes this further distinction between the Childhood and autobiography:

> Essential to the argument of the present study is the contention that the Childhood differs from standard autobiography in that it is not so much an attempt to "tell the story of a life," as to recreate an autonomous, now-vanished self which formerly existed in an alternative dimension: a "magical" or "play" dimension, controlled by concepts and rules, not necessarily incompatible with, but nonetheless essentially *different* from those which dominate the more rational and pragmatically oriented life of the adult. (293)

Although Fritz is definitely recreating her child self, she is also very much concerned with telling her life as a child, a life dominated by adults. If Jean exists in an "alternative dimension" as a child, then it is not one that is wholly "magical" (in the positive sense) or non-rational: the alternative dimension of the child is less "pragmatically oriented" than the adult's because the child is not in control of her life. Her life is circumscribed by the demands imposed on her by the "rational" and "pragmatic" adult world.

In his preface, Coe identifies three problems he has to cope with in his study. First, "the standard equipment of literary criticism" is "inadequate" and needs to be bolstered by "Digressions. . . into philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and sociology" (xi-xii). The second is triviality: "By adult standards, the experience of the child—especially the very young child—is necessarily trivial" (xii). This is a matter of perspective, but Coe's study privileges the adult perspective. His references to childhoods written for a "juvenile readership" are scant and are mostly passing remarks made in footnotes. The third problem, "the most serious one," is that "the experience of childhood—at least in the minds of those poets who, over the last century and a half, have begun to analyze the autonomous existence of their former selves—is 'magical'" (xii). While I grant that children perceive the world differently from adults and that they prefer simple answers and clear cut reasons for the ways of the world, I disagree with Coe that the limitations we tend to impose on childhood constrict its broad horizons in the way he maintains. What Coe identifies as the trivial and the magical are not usually perceived as problems in the field of children's literature. The trivial matters he identifies are often whole worlds in themselves; they only seem trivial to an adult preoccupied by "important" matters. The child's world of play is enviable because magic can still happen there; the taps of faith have not yet been shut off. But that is not to say that "trivial" things, like butterfly wings and magical moments, are absolutely peculiar to childhood. My own problem with Coe's work is the complete adult bias in his views and comments about the world of childhood. No work can cover every aspect of a subject and, although I find it regrettable, I am not surprised that out of the over six hundred works on which Coe bases his study, he mentions but does not discuss childhoods written for a young readership. A representative list of authors is given at the end of his preface:

> the "great" poets of the Childhood are not necessarily the great names of literary history. Sometimes they are—Gide, Gorky, Joyce, Stendhal, Tolstoy—but with equal frequency they are not. Sergei Aksakov, Andrei Bely, Paul Chamberland, Francis Jammes, Maxine Hong Kingston, James Kirkup, Hal Porter, Kathleen Raine, Henry Handel Richardson, Thomas Wolfe—all these have written great Childhoods whereas more universally acclaimed writers have failed lamentably. The Childhood is not merely an autonomous genre; it is an art in itself. (xiv)

While the childhoods that Coe examines and refers to share characteristics with childhoods written for a young readership, the voices of their narrators, particularly those using immediate-engaging-first-person narration, are markedly different.

The difference in voice is not due only to the readership being addressed. The voice of the adult narrator, who typically uses distant-engaging or distancing narration, reflects a number of "essential elements of structure" that, Coe maintains, are inherent in Childhood writing. These include

> the tension which arises, on the one hand, from the sense of continuity from past to present, thus enabling the adult to *explain* his present self in terms of his childhood experience; and, on the other, from the sense of difference, of discontinuity, which makes it possible for the adult to *judge* his past self as though it were another. (59)

These elements of structure raise an interesting matter regarding autobiography through a child narrator or, potentially, any autobiography using immediate-engaging-first-person narration. Jean the child narrator has not become Jean the grown-up by the end of the narrative; however, Jean the grown-up is writing Jean the child. Because Jean is narrating as a child (and to child readers) the quality of her reflections and judgements must be in keeping with her narrating position. Self-reconstruction is the crux of the matter in the writing of autobiography.

Children's writers frequently continue to be immersed in the world of childhood even as adults. As a result the link between adult and child has not been broken in the way Coe suggests. Rather than treating her child self as alien to her adult self Jean Fritz conveys the sense of a younger, less experienced self but a self to whom she is nevertheless still intimately connected. Jean does not "judge" herself. The narrative simply recounts the childhood experiences that obviously had a great impact on her then and whose weight is significant enough to warrant setting down in writing years later; Jean the adult does not explain or rationalize her childhood self. Coe, on the other hand, maintains quite a different view on the relationship between the adult-self and the child-self:

> The former self-as-child is as alien to the adult writer as to the adult reader. The child sees differently, reasons differently, reacts differently. An *alternative* world has to be created and made convincing. (1)

Coe is apparently "the kind of grown-up who [thinks] childhood [is] something left behind, just a time to remember" (*China Homecoming* 29). Furthermore, his description of the child as alien makes it sound as if childhood might be remembered, but its workings can not be understood. Fritz categorizes grown-ups as follows: "There are two kinds of grown-ups: some simply remember and some know that a person doesn't have to be a grown-up *or* a child. It is possible to be both at the same time, carrying the child part right along inside the grown-up self" (*CH* 29-30). The idea of carrying the child part right along is corroborated by Paul Zindel's statement towards the end of his autobiography, *The Pigman & Me*:

> You know, when you look back on the past and try to remember what it was like to be a teenager, you can't remember every single detail. Most of what I remember

> has to do with Nonno Frankie. Of course, a lot of the past doesn't mean anything, but there are highlights you remember, and those highlights sometimes are pieces of a big puzzle that come together in the end as sure as destiny. (113-14)

In other words, the highlights are the pieces of the child, or teenager, that you carry along with you. Zindel's autobiography focuses on the events of one particular year which culminated in a critical revelation. Like Fritz's autobiography, Zindel's is not a chronological catalogue of memories from infancy to adulthood, and the narrative is very much story centered; that is, events are causally related. An autobiography is a story built upon the corner stone of memory. Sidonie Smith articulates an important reminder about memory in the writing of autobiography:

> the autobiographer has to rely on a trace of something from the past, a memory; yet memory is ultimately a story about, and thus a discourse on, original experience, so that recovering the past is not a hypostasizing of fixed grounds and absolute origins but, rather, an interpretation of earlier experience that can never be divorced from the filterings of subsequent experience or articulated outside the structures of language and storytelling. As a result, autobiography becomes both the process and the product of assigning meaning to a series of experiences, after they have taken place, by means of emphasis, juxtaposition, commentary, omission. (45)

The critical difference between the narrator of a childhood for a youthful readership and the narrator for an adult readership is the way in which meaning is assigned to experience. A similar difference underlines the distinction between an immediate-engaging and a distant-engaging or distancing narration.

Coe questions how a writer can capture the wonder of the mythical garden of childhood when the real wonders lie in the world beyond. Coe assumes that the world of childhood is a small world:

> The child's world is the world, not of mountains, but of molehills; primarily not of steppes and prairies, but quite specifically of gardens. . . . But this brings us back to our central problem: the technique of description exercised in a special context. How does the writer handle his vision of the small world of childhood, when by force of geographical circumstances, the most impressive feature of that world is its vastness, its lack of boundaries, its infinitude? (130)

It is very well to suggest that the world is smaller from a child's perspective; but surely the smallness depends on the size and age of the child in question, not to mention the child's experience. Jean's world is vast—it spans two continents. Even though one of those continents is, for the most part, constructed in the imagination (America, until Jean finally gets there), I think it is fair to say that her world is definitely one that contains at least a concept of mountains, as well as the literal mountain she must climb to get to Kuling for her last summer vacation, a climb during which she is suspended three thousand feet up in the air as her rickshaw goes around corners. Although children may not necessarily be able to comprehend the entire significance of mountains they are certainly aware of their existence and the importance of finding a way to climb them. For a child of eleven the vastness of the world is more accessible than for a child of two or seven. The problem with Coe's definition of childhood, then, is that it does not adequately distinguish between the different periods that make up childhood. Since the writing of autobiography, even of a Childhood, is a selective process, there must be some account taken, by both writer and reader, of the parts of a given childhood that the autobiographer has chosen to reconstruct. Furthermore, writer and reader must take account of the boundaries imposed on childhood by adults. For it is adults who stake the fence around the garden in an attempt to preserve innocence and keep experience at bay.

Jean's innocence is preserved to the point that, at the age of eleven, the announcement of her baby sister's birth comes as a complete surprise to her. Despite her euphoria at the news, she feels vexed at having been kept in the dark and even blames herself for not having noticed:

> But how could I not have noticed? I asked myself. How could I not have seen what was going on under those loose dresses? There was part of me that might have felt cross but I couldn't feel cross today. (69)

Three weeks later, after Miriam's death, and for the rest of the summer, Jean's mother's main concern during their visits at the hospital is with Jean's behavior. Jean describes her resentment in terms of a vivid image which clearly highlights her understanding of the vastness of mountains and the world and the interminability of time: "All summer long, I felt like a coolie who has had a load strapped to his back before going up the mountain" (72). The growing up and out of childhood is very like the process of climbing a mountain. The process gets progressively more difficult as more and more responsibility is strapped onto the growing load on the child's back. However, in Jean's case, the responsibility is not productive and therefore its weight is more onerous. As she gets older she is expected to behave increasingly more like an adult but without the knowledge or ability to actively participate intellectually on an even footing with her elders. There is evidence of Jean's vulnerability early on in her narrative. The sense of Jean feeling alone, abandoned and small, is reflected in her description of the hall:

> I stood in the hall, trying to catch my breath, and as always I began to feel small. It was a huge hall with ceilings so high it was as if they would have nothing to do with people. Certainly not with a mere child, not with me—the only child in the house. Once I asked my best friend, Andrea, if the hall made her feel little too. She said no. She was going to be a dancer and she loved space. She did a high kick to show how grand it was to have room. (13)

The way the hall makes Jean feel is symbolic of how she feels in the adult world in which she lives. She is an only child, and, because she is forever being protected from the "real" world of adults, she is intimidated by her lack of knowledge and experience. It is fitting to have her describe her relation to the huge hall after her encounter with Ian Forbes, the school bully. She is already feeling vulnerable and when she enters the haven of her home she is reminded, once again, of her vulnerability. Jean's personification of the hall would be taken as another perfect indication of her "childishness" by the adults in her life because a hall is just a hall, it is not an entity capable of passing judgement. The fact that her friend Andrea is not intimidated by the hall is significant, not so much because she appears to have a different attitude about space, but because her confidence reflects the way she is treated at home. Andrea, unlike Jean, is not mollycoddled by her parents.

The hugeness of the hall, then, serves to remind Jean how much she does not know or has not been told and it is the enormity of the unknown that makes her feel so small. Andrea takes the vastness of space waiting to be filled with knowledge in stride because knowledge is not forbidden to her and therefore is not as ominous as it is to Jean. One of the reasons Jean likes Andrea is because Andrea shares her knowledge—she is a key to the world as it really is. However, the things she learns from Andrea, how to use commas, the genesis of babies and the foreboding concept of the end of the world, do not make Jean feel good because she is frustrated that her parents keep this knowledge from her. Jean's frustration at her lack of knowledge and productive responsibility often turns to anger. Her anger is one of the driving forces of her autobiography and makes it clear that childhood is not a calm and lovely garden, but rather a changeable landscape filled with desires and questions.

Because Jean resists the social order that defines how she should behave and because she is often silenced in her position as a child, she is often left to work emotional matters out on her own. When Jean's baby sister, Miriam, dies, she has to be careful not to upset her mother. She has to remain silent on a matter on which she has built up all kinds of hopes. When she goes to see her mother, they do not talk about Miriam: "It seemed to me that I would never dare say Miriam's name to my mother for fear of what it might to do her" (76). Jean is immensely upset by the loss of her sister, but she has to internalize her loss for fear of hurting her mother. She wants to celebrate her sister's brief life, the fact that she had a sister, even if only for a few weeks. Because Miriam is on her mind so much, she eventually does hurt her mother by blurting out, some time later, how she had just been telling her friends that Miriam would be four months old had she lived. Denying the fact that she had a sister is as bad as having lost her. Jean's mother's reaction to her outburst is predictably anguished:

> My mother looked as if I'd slapped her in the face. She didn't say a word, but as she went back into the house, I knew she would never in her whole life talk about Miriam. It was as if I'd never had a baby sister. (95)

Mother and daughter would both have profited from talking out their grief, but Jean, the child, is expected to respect her mother's silence on the subject and follow suit. It is by writing about her baby sister that Jean breaks an important silence in her life. Writing is a way of revisioning and a way of saving the past. It is by writing that Jean rescues both her sister and herself from oblivion. In *China Homecoming*, Fritz describes her impetus to write her own story after her father's death:

> If I wanted to talk about old times in Hankow, there was not one single person I could talk to. It was scary. It was as if the story I had been telling myself over and over was beginning to evaporate into thin air.
>
> There was only one thing I could do. I could write it all down quickly before it slipped away. Once it was in black and white between the covers of a book, it would be safe. (19)

She feels the same urgency to preserve her China homecoming on paper (*CH* 135), to construct a narrative that will both save and make sense of her experiences and thus attempt to resolve her feelings of otherness.

Jean's sense of otherness, her sense of aloneness in a country where she doesn't belong and where she is frequently reminded of this by strangers, is marked by the stress on emotional rather than temporal continuity in her autobiography. Jean Fritz says in her "Foreword" that eventually she "decided to forget about sequence and just get on with it." She says she set out to tell a story in a form that gave her "the freedom to recreate the emotions that I remember so vividly." Richard Coe links the recreation of emotions and their significance to the Childhood, claiming that:

> Incidents are given weight in the straight autobiography according to their factual significance; in the Childhood, more often than not, according to their emotional, imaginative, or metaphysical significance. Details therefore may be adjusted and emphasized in such a way as to bring out their full import to the child as a *child*, rather than as a future writer. This adaptation of the literal facts so as to achieve a surer delineation of the past self is particularly apparent in the handling of the family. (79)

The idea of emphasizing the importance of various details from the child's point of view is crucial in a Childhood written for children. The emotion that underpins the relations between child and parents in *Homesick* is frustration and anger. Jean is frustrated time and time again by being treated as a child, that is to say, by being kept in the dark about information to which she feels she has a right. Her friend Andrea is only one year older but lives in a very open family and knows all sorts of things long before Jean:

> She told me things that sounded so crazy I had to ask my mother if they were true. Like where babies come from. And that someday the whole world would end. My mother would frown when I asked her, but she always agreed that Andrea

> was right. It made me furious. How could she know such things and not tell me? What was the matter with grown-ups anyway? (14)

I am disturbed by Coe's use of the phrase "alternative dimension," because it strikes me as a glib generalization about the narrative construction of childhood. Coe suggests that the world of childhood has to be "created" as if it never existed in the first place. I counter that it must be re-created in much the same way that the child self has to be re-created. This whole process pivots on re-cognition, of knowing and rediscovering that knowledge. Paul Eakin describes the process of recognition in autobiography as, in part, a process of self-reconstruction:

> . . . the act of composition may be conceived as a mediating term in the autobiographical enterprise, reaching back into the past not merely to recapture but to repeat the psychological rhythms of identity formation, and reaching forward into the future to fix the structure of this identity in a permanent self-made existence as literary text. This is to understand the writing of autobiography not merely as the passive, transparent record of an already complete self but rather as an integral and often decisive phase of the drama of self-definition. (226)

From Coe's point of view we must view the child as other, as a part of the writer's present self that is fixed in a past that can only be reconstructed, such that the child who figures in an autobiographical narrative is "an already completed self." However, this "completed self" is more of a theoretical consideration than a quality of the child narrator. The drama of self-definition is figuratively limited to a one-act play in an autobiography of childhood that covers a time span of two to three years (as opposed to a three- or five-act play featuring, say, childhood, adolescence and adulthood or schooling, love, marriage, parenthood and old age). Jean, for example, is by no means a completed self at the end of *Homesick*; she is beginning her new life in America. Nevertheless, her China childhood is over. *Homesick*, therefore, repeats the "psychological rhythms of identity formation" that are crucial to Jean's self-definition. The act of composing a self in process manifests itself differently in a narrative like *Homesick* because it operates more on the surprise of (re)discovery than on the considered piecing together, and adult rationalizing, of what happened.

Childhood and adolescence are the foundational puzzle pieces of every life. The autobiographies of children's and young adult authors I have read substantiate that the world of childhood is not necessarily alternative to the adult world. It is a world that these writers have sought to keep in touch with; their past is a living part of their present. But the voice of the narrator in the autobiographies of children's writers who use immediate engaging first-person narration will recall the kind of commentary typical of the older, wiser and

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For example, William Sleator's *Oddballs*, [illegible] ironic narrator of adult narratives that use distant-engaging or distancing narration.

Knowledge, writing and silence of women and children

Women and children share a history with many points in common. Their stories include the struggle for access to knowledge and the right to speak up for themselves. Women's autobiography has been around for a long time but is only recently being accorded serious consideration. The autobiography of childhood is comparatively only at the fledgling stage. The overlap between the two is instructive, particularly in a case like *Homesick*, where the writer chooses to narrate her girlhood, a time in which knowledge and silence are at odds with her desire to come to terms with her self.

Sidonie Smith argues that,

> During the past five hundred years, autobiography has assumed a central position in the personal and literary life of the West precisely because it serves as one of those generic contracts that reproduces the patriarchy and its ideologies of gender. (44)

Because autobiography is an androcentric genre which typically tells the story of a "public, heroic life," woman effectively "has no autobiographical self in the same sense that man does" (50). Woman's story is one of silence. Her knowledge and her relationship to language is circumscribed by silence. A woman's attempt to break the silence surrounding her, to express her knowledge, to relate her experience, in short, to tell her story, is "potentially catastrophic. To call attention to her distinctiveness is to become 'unfeminine.' To take a voice and to authorize a public life are to risk loss of reputation" (Smith 10).

Women's and children's experiences are related because they are both similarly dismissed or made light of. When Richard N. Coe identifies the trivial and the magical as problem areas in his study, it is because the "adult" view of the world does not accord the trivial and the magical the same status, or value, that they are accorded by children. Similarly, the list of women's virtues, behaviour that are expected, is not held to be of as great value as men's virtues. Nevertheless, as Sidonie Smith demonstrates by tracing the history of women's autobiography, the silence, like ice, has been chipped away at over time and the promise of spring is tangible.

In "Artful Memory: Jean Fritz, Autobiography, and the Child Reader," [illegible] examines *Homesick* in terms of the intersection "of writing for children and . . . of being a female autobiographer" ([illegible]). [illegible] makes some important observations regarding childhood, knowledge and autobiography. With regard to truth she points out,

> We are accustomed to the idea that biography and autobiography for children are only relatively truthful in that they [illegible] brought to the [illegible] for [illegible] . . . What I want to suggest instead is that we think along

> a limitation, writing for a child audience can be an enabling situation in which the writer, in particular the woman writer, can explore or create a self and find a voice that writing for an adult audience may preclude. (364)

Writing about a young child for child readers can allow for a stronger character, the girl before she passes through the fires of adolescent rebellion and conformity. Twelve is a convenient and interesting age for writers to represent because it is on the threshold between childhood and adolescence. Children may be excused certain behaviors that simply won't do in a girl on the cusp of young womanhood. The price of being a naughty child is not quite as high as behaving in an inappropriate way as a young woman. Sidonie Smith remarks,

> Since autobiography is a public expression, she [the autobiographer] speaks before and to "man." Attuned to the ways women have been dressed up for public exposure, attuned also to the price women pay for public self-disclosure, the autobiographer reveals in her speaking posture and narrative structure her understanding of the possible readings she will receive from a public that has the power of her reputation in its hands. . . [Women] understand that a statement or a story will receive a different ideological interpretation if attributed to a man or to a woman. (49)

It follows that a story will be interpreted differently again if it is narrated by a child rather than an adult and also, further, if it is addressed to a child or adolescent readership rather than to an adult readership. Alberghene's point, then, is especially salient if writing for an adult audience means following the narrative patterns that Coe has outlined, wherein childhood experience and the voice of the child are basically belittled, quite literally "made small" by the privileging of adult rationalism. Yet, surely, the voice of the child can be represented as faithfully for adults as it is in writing for children; immediate-engaging narration need not be limited to children's literature.

Alberghene's article also outlines how Fritz combines both masculine and feminine autobiographical elements in her narrative. She links this combination to the central theme of Fritz's text by presenting a strong alternative to the notion of the (in)complete self at the close of the narrative, and thus challenges the most essential element of the childhood, as Coe defines it, and thereby engages with childhood in autobiography on a completely different plane. Alberghene states:

> Unlike the decentered, disjunctive narrative typical of women's autobiographies, Fritz's autobiography has a single point of view—young Jean's—that is so central and consistent that she sometimes sounds very naive. She is *focused*, however, as is the narrative, which moves determinedly forward to Jean's reunion with her grandmother. . . . The paradox is that Fritz uses "masculine" formal elements in a work progressively masculine in movement but feminine in that it presents a fragmented or incomplete self: Fritz feels that she is not

> "American" enough. This is a central issue in the text, one that makes it impossible to write off Fritz's sense of incompleteness as a concomitant to her being a child and therefore unfinished. The fragmented self is so characteristic of women's autobiographies that the significance of *Homesick*'s formal structures might be seen to pale were it not for the book's detailing the emergence of another sense of self, one in marked contrast to the incomplete self. This self feels whole because it is a "self-at-home." (365)

Young Jean's single point of view is the voice and perspective of the immediate-engaging narrator. If she were not sometimes naïve then the reader's level of engagement would drop, the spell would effectively be broken, and the voice of the implied author would outweigh the voice of the focalizer; that is, their voices could no longer be considered effectively blended. The point of focus is key in childhoods written in immediate-engaging-first-person narration. Alberghene's notion of the self-at-home underscores my earlier point that despite the fact that Jean's cherished fantasy, the Myth of America, is shattered, the kernel of the story, her sense of belonging and family, bears fruit. If that center had not held, her disillusion might have overwhelmed her.

In trying to make sense of her story, to give it shape and meaning, Fritz telescopes her childhood into two years and into seven specific chapters. The narrative focus is on a return home that, for Jean, is an arrival more than a return since America is the place she has originated from, but has never actually been to. The young Jean hopes, and expects, that upon her arrival she will feel "real" and whole. Her hopes are not fully realized, as I have already demonstrated, but they are tempered by her acceptance of compromise. The compromise that Jean must accept is that, while America does not live up to her expectations, her entire perspective of home and family changes; she is no longer a mere child in an overwhelming hallway but a central part of the action:

> In China I'd had nothing to do with the work of the house. It just went on automatically around me as if it could have been anyone's house, but now suddenly I was part of what went on. I had a place. For instance. My grandmother might ask me if we had enough sugar in the house or should she get some, and likely as not, I would know. (144)

Jean is delighted to become part of the world of domestic detail because it is a concrete form of knowledge that grounds her participation in the family and because it stands in marked contrast to her China childhood where, more often than not, she was informed about decisions after the fact rather than being included in decision making.

Jean's arrival in America marks an important transition in her sense of belonging. Nevertheless, China continues to be part of her, as she acknowledges in *China Homecoming*.[1] Jean's arrival in America marks a new beginning, both in terms of her experience and in terms of the significance of the idea of being homesick. Although homesickness is a theme that pervades literature about the immigrant experience, Jan Alberghene concludes:

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[1] "As soon as I was asleep, off I'd rush to the Yangtse River. . . . As hard as I was trying to grow up American, I could not let China go" (8).

> A person who is homesick, however, does better to turn to the conventions and impulses of children's literature. So too does a person looking for a pattern with which to construct a unified sense of self. As critics Christopher Clausen, Virginia Wolf, and others have shown, children's literature does its best to bring both the stories' protagonists and child readers home. The protagonists return with a more integrated sense of self, not one that is more diffuse. And perhaps in writing the returns, the authors who create them feel their own real selves experience that integration too. At least that seems to be the case with Fritz, who responded to the question, "How were you particularly attracted to writing for children?" like this: "I wonder sometimes whether it was the fact that my childhood was so cut off from the rest of my life, and that I had the feeling I should hang on to it very strongly in my memory or else I would lose a whole big chunk of life itself" (*Contemporary Authors*, 16: 127). (366-67)

Fritz has certainly managed to save that chunk of her life and yet her written narrative is not identical to her life experience. Ultimately, the story is what matters because all we ever have left are the stories of our experiences. Annie Dillard cautions would-be memoir writers:

> Don't hope in a memoir to preserve your memories. If you prize your memories as they are, by all means avoid—eschew—writing a memoir. Because it is a certain way to lose them. You can't put together a memoir without cannibalizing your own life for parts. The work battens on your memories. And it replaces them. (70)

As a writer Jean Fritz undoubtedly realized what she was undertaking. Stephanie Loer notes, in her entry on Fritz in *Children's Books and their Creators*, Fritz's comment, "I needed to write *Homesick* before I returned to China so I wouldn't mix up the present with memories" (258). By fixing her childhood memories on paper before her return to China, she could at least be certain that the only part of her own life she was "cannibalizing" was, in fact, her childhood.

The fundamental process of selection and organization of memory and experience is clearly the same for any autobiographer. The time Fritz describes is certainly "other" to my own experience but it is not shrouded by a tangible unreality, as Coe suggests the world of childhood necessarily is. The difference that is most striking in autobiographical narratives for children is the choice some writers make to omit the voice of the mature self, that is, to convey the child's experiences in immediate-engaging-first-person narration. The omission of an adult narrating self in autobiographical narratives indicates the willingness to let childhood experience speak "for itself" and is another example of the gradual effacement of the authorial narrator whose voice once served to highlight the educational value of stories. Over time a shift in purpose seems to have evolved. Rather than have an adult narrator explain or make sense of a child's experience, often with the aim of highlighting the moral of the story, the newer approach is to present the experience without an accompanying overt rationale even when a blended voice is used. According to Rita Felski, a similar shift can be observed in the evolution of feminist writing:

> The omniscient narrator is typically replaced by a personalized narrator whose perspective is either identical with or sympathetic to that of the protagonist; there is a consequent shrinking of focus from the general survey of the social world to the feelings and responses of the experiencing subject. The stress is on internal rather than external self, upon the exploration of conflict and ambivalences in relation to the problematic of self-identity. (82)

In writing about childhood and youth, the narrative stress is on the relatively immediate impact of a given experience rather than its relevance to the future adult. The child-self is not required to be explained or accepted by the adult self—it just is.

Jean's narrative combines childhood knowing and the knowledge of childhood to challenge Coe's limited and limiting description of childhood from an adult narrator's point of view. The focus of Jean's autobiography is proof that childhoods are not always shrouded in a comforting haze of nostalgia and that autobiography for children need not elide the pains and difficulties that are part of living. Clearly, Fritz feels that childhood is an integral, rather than an expendable, part of life. Most of the writing she has done is biographical and historical and her goal has been to rescue people from oblivion. In the process, she "has given children a voice in history, as well as giving history a voice for children" (Sutherland 162). Her work goes a long way to disproving Coe's vision of childhood, as the introduction to her Zena Sutherland lecture of 1990 details. The introduction praises Fritz's achievements, all of which are premised on her trust in children's interest and intelligence and their desire to understand not only the vastness of the world but the complexity of human motivation:

> More than any other writer, she has brought to history-writing for children a sense of story that does not distract from the essentially captivating facts. Her perception, selection, and development of true stories has given shape to biography that ranges from a lighthearted look at the quirks of America's founding fathers to serious studies of those whom U. S. history caught in its cruelest dilemmas.
>
> More than any other writer, she has imbued history-writing for children with an honesty that replaces the kind of superficial adulation that equates leadership with didactic role models. She acknowledges to children that even the greatest human beings are still only human, a condition

> that enhances their achievements with struggles common to us all.
>
> And finally, more than any other writer, she has injected history-writing for children with a sense of humor, not in a cutesy effort to sweeten reality. She sees that, on balance, human beings are a funny lot despite their tragic blunders, and she delivers the evidence with wit and style. Her humorous perspective provides a sense of balance sadly missing from many accounts of the past, and it makes the specifics unforgettable. (160-61)

Details matter. The details of childhood that cling to our memory are of interest precisely because we remember them. Trying to make sense of such details is what makes autobiography a compelling and engaging genre. Autobiography has an additional hold over its readers precisely because we are more likely to resist the temptation to pass if off as just another story. The autobiography of childhood, which explores the shifting boundaries of responsibility as the growing child tries to fit herself into the social order, narrated by a child, or a youth, requires a different poetics than that outlined by Richard Coe. That poetics can be addressed through the detailing of the different types of first-person narration in narrative theory. If recent immediate-engaging-first-person autobiographical narratives of childhood like Zindel's *The Pigman & Me* and William Sleator's *Oddballs* are any indication, autobiography is going to become an increasingly important component of literature for children as the increasing numbers of writers for children and young adults engage in the process of committing their own childhoods to paper.

Chapter IV
Jessica Vye, "writer beyond all possible doubt:" Direct address & Readerly engagement.

> I have read desultorily the writings of the younger generation. . . . I admire their polish—their youth is already so accomplished that it seems absurd to speak of promise—I marvel at the felicity of their style. . . (their vocabulary suggests that they fingered Roget's *Thesaurus* in their cradles). . . (*The Moon and Sixpence* 15)

> The adolescent novel of ideas is marked at its best by the logic, spaciousness, and lack of compromise of its "what ifs". (Hollindale 86-7)

This chapter begins by considering *A Long Way From Verona*'s relation to the genre of the Künstlerroman. Its structure and use of patterns is then considered in relation to Barthes' idea of the classic, or readerly text; an idea I rework in the context of engagement. Readerly engagement is fostered on the reader's recognition of a series of textual connections. Next I examine Jessica's style of narration through a close reading of the first chapter that highlights her use of direct address, that is, the fact that she directly addresses you-the-reader. Her narration is then considered in the light of my earlier discussion of reliability and the use of irony in immediate-engaging-first-person narration. Finally, I propose that *A Long Way From Verona* belongs to what Peter Hollindale calls the adolescent novel of ideas.

A Long Way From Verona offers us an especially intense look at the transitional period of adolescence, a time, according to Katherine Dalsimer,

> in which an enlarged self-preoccupation must substitute—temporarily and partially—for relations with others. Keeping a diary, the chronicle of one's inner life, is ideally suited to the concerns of this phase. . . . During this transitional period, self-disparagement and grandiosity often coexist, or fluctuate rapidly, creating a strange, Alice-in-Wonderland sense of confusion and discontinuity. (8)

Jessica's narrative is marked by this Alice-in-Wonderland sense of confusion, although the overt readerliness of the text itself balances any moments of seeming discontinuity. Her narration is in three parts: The Maniac, The Boy, and The Poem. These titles represent, in effect, the kernel events of each section and their interconnection becomes apparent toward the end of the narrative. Her experience with the maniac, an escaped Italian prisoner, in the first part is what she writes about in the poem but she is unable to write the poem until she experiences certain events with the boy. The key events paradigmatically replace one another so that earlier events are embedded in subsequent events. And, in the end, it becomes apparent that the poem is part of a larger oeuvre, the portrait of Jessica Vye, "writer beyond all possible doubt" (14).

Verona as Künstlerroman

The thread that sews together Jessica's use of direct address in her narration and the readerliness of the final product is genre. *A Long Way From Verona* is a portrait of a young artist and it incorporates the classic elements of the Künstlerroman. Jessica's narrative blends two vital aspects of her growth: one is her growth as an individual and the psychological process of her adolescent individuation and the other is her discovery of her voice as a writer.

During the first half of the narrative she reads W. Somerset Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence* three times. It is clear that Jessica takes her cue from Maugham's narrator; the writer should write for himself because nobody else's pleasure can be guaranteed:

> The moral I draw is that the writer should seek his reward in the pleasure of his work and in release from the burden of his thought; and, indifferent to aught else, care nothing for praise or censure, failure or success. (Maugham 13)

Perhaps that is why Barbara Wall comments that Jessica "is too interested in herself and her status as a writer to care much about whom she is addressing" (255). Jessica's self-interest is typical both of the adolescent and the artist. I do not want to undertake a full psychoanalytic reading of the novel, but I find that some of the points Katherine Dalsimer makes are helpful in considering Jessica's character, and to counter Wall's criticism thereof, because they are an important reminder that it is not atypical for Jessica, like other girls in early to middle adolescence, to be frequently, as Wall puts it,

> concerned more with herself, with coming to grips with her problems, with writing to understand, with writing to record what she has learnt to understand, than with the persons who will perhaps sometime read what she has written. (256)

Jessica's problem, as an individual and as an aspiring artist, is that she is thirteen and suffering through the tribulations and exhilarations of early to middle adolescence, which are further accentuated by the exigencies of wartime. Her account of her relationship with herself, her parents, her friends, the teachers at her school, and the books she reads chart her struggle for individuation and maturation and mark the process and the progress of her self-portrait.

In the first in-depth study of the Künstlerroman, Maurice Beebe identifies two traditions, which he calls the "Sacred Fount" and the "Ivory Tower:"

> the Sacred Fount tradition tends to equate art with experience and assumes that the true artist is one who lives not less, but more fully and intensely than others. Within this tradition art is essentially the re-creation of experience. The Ivory Tower tradition, on the other hand, exalts art above life and insists that the artist can make use of life only if he stands

> aloof. . . . for the Ivory Tower tradition equates art with religion rather than experience. (13)

Beebe argues that "the typical artist-hero" usually finds himself divided by the two traditions. Grace Stewart points out that, "For the female novelist, Beebe's labels of Ivory Tower and Sacred Fount have a different meaning. . . . Rather than *work* in fount or tower, the female artist is *confined* by one or the other tradition" (14). Because Jessica is still so young, it is difficult to say that she works in or is confined by either the fount or the tower. In this sense she is not bound by tradition even though she is steeped in it. Jessica's art emerges from her experiences but it is also informed by her retreat into the Ivory Tower's library; thus, she is divided by the two traditions.

The tension between the self and society and the tension between the inner and the outer self are fundamental to the artist novel. The division in Jessica's character is marked by the difference in what she feels and what she says. She has a difficult time reconciling polite social responses with the honesty of heart-felt responses. That is to say, she often does not react to situations according to how she really feels. Instead, she tries to divert herself and others by, quite literally, being contrary. One example of this occurs when Jessica wants to hold her arms out to the fire in the Fanshawe's day nursery but holds them to herself instead, puts on "the filthiest face" and asks out loud, "'However do you manage to get the coal?'" (101). Another example, which might be said to prove how reliably she confesses her unreliability to others to the reader, comes after a description of an afternoon she spends with her friend, Florence:

> I've said at the beginning that I'm not able to tell lies for one reason and another, but I suppose I did come pretty near it when Florence asked me why I didn't read anything any more and I said I didn't know. What I should have said was, "I do." I should have said, "I read all the time. In fact, I never did read before. Little did you know," I should have said, "how I read." I am even a bit afraid of the way I read. (166)

Jessica enjoys Florence's company but often withholds part of herself when they are together. Grace Stewart remarks that "The polarity of solitude and companionship causes a frequent conflict in the Künstlerroman, but in one written by a female, the solitude is antithetical to her concept of womanhood as well" (17). This is undoubtedly exacerbated by the fact that the majority of Jessica's literary models are male. *The Moon and Sixpence* is unequivocally sexist in its representation of women and presents a thoroughly male view of the artist. What is particularly interesting about Jessica's character is that there are so many dualities, like solitude and companionship, at work, all of which reflect the concerns of the Künstlerroman while also pinpointing the important themes in novels of adolescent development. Maurice Beebe concludes that the archetype of the artist

> implies that there are always two selves within the artist, that these selves are in conflict, and that the conflict may be found within the work produced. (303)

In some respects the two selves present within Jessica are the child and the young woman. This can be seen in the young woman wanting to be spoken to openly after her experience with the prisoner (57-59) and in the child's desire to be silly and spontaneous when Jessica and Florence are reprimanded for hanging on the railings (151-52).

Quite a bit of Jessica's commentary focuses on her relationship with those around her. She repeatedly states throughout the narrative that she feels disliked and that everyone, including herself, is changing, is becoming somehow different. When she voices this feeling to her teacher, in a moment of communicative honesty, Miss Pemberton replies, "It's always the same this term in this form. You'll be better when you're in the seniors next year and when the spring comes" (83). Miss Pemberton's comment acknowledges the transitional phase of adolescence her students are in, but only accepts its inevitability rather than explaining its causes. The criticisms Jessica makes about the people in her daily life are quite telling in terms of the adolescent struggle for individuation. Katherine Dalsimer explains that

> To allow for the necessary disengagement from the parents, the child's idealization of them must yield to a more critical appraisal. But as the parents shrink to smaller proportions, so does the adolescent's sense of his or her own powers, and the young adolescent's inner experience often oscillates between a sense of superiority and one of emptiness. (30)

The sense of superiority usually comes across in *Verona* as scathing criticism, whereas the sense of emptiness is frequently indicated by a break in the narrative in which we find out that Jessica has taken to her bed for one reason or another, usually because she is "in a mood." It's as if the sense of emptiness is much more difficult to articulate, though she does succeed toward the end of the book when she says she is utterly alone and knows nothing (183). Girls in particular struggle to break the bond with their mothers. They tend to become very critical when they realize that their mothers no longer match their ideal of "the mother." Jessica notes the differences in her mother and blames them on her change in social status:

> My mother's very new to the job [of curate's wife] too and finds it much harder than father. She was marvellous at being a schoolmaster's wife. . . drinking coffee with the other wives in nice, plain, good-taste sitting rooms and giving little supper parties. . . mother had a lot of free time, and had her hair done. She wasn't bad looking then.
>
> She's got a bit red in the face now and rather wild, slamming and crashing about and her clothes are vile. . . . When she gets angry she seems to grow knobs all over her face. . . . When I'm at school I might just as well be be dead for all the interest she takes, and I hope she finds this book and reads what I've said. (72-3)

These comments demonstrate that Jessica tries to veil her feelings of emptiness and her need for attention by finding fault with her environment. A lot of Jessica's commentary about her mother centers on the amount of work she sees her mother scrambling to get done: "'Mother's nuts,' I thought, 'having a fender you've got to polish. It's just one more thing.'"(77); " . . . the tablecloth (embroidered Michaelmas daisies—another thing we could do without. Another thing she has to iron every flipping Tuesday)" (89). Jessica's dissatisfaction is typical both of novels of adolescence and the Künstlerroman. Maurice Beebe lists "dissatisfaction with the domestic environment" as one of the "familiar features of the artist hero tradition" (22).

For some, adolescence is marked by a creative outpouring in the form of poetry, journals and music in order to express their experience in some measure. As Katherine Dalsimer points out

> That the subject of this creative outpouring is so often "I"—my moods, my beliefs, my uncertainties—suggests its specific developmental purpose. As the childhood ties to parents are in the process of being relinquished, but new bonds have not yet been consolidated, there is a period of transition in which an enlarged self-preoccupation must substitute—temporarily and partially—for relations with others. (7)

Jessica's narrative could be viewed as a kind of diary or journal, a journal that chronicles both her struggles as an adolescent and as an aspiring artist. The subject of the Künstlerroman faces similar developmental stages although the artist's withdrawal from relations with others usually results from a nearly complete preoccupation with the work of art itself. Jessica's narrative is a personal account of events important to her. And yet it is also quite clearly a story which Jessica feels is worthy of narration. She is, after all, attempting to prove that she is indeed a writer beyond all possible doubt. The process of proving herself to be a writer is a kind of inner journey which parallels a quest. Grace Stewart notes that, in the Künstlerroman, "the journey involves a creative process in more ways than one" (7) and quotes Gerald Jay Goldberg's observation:

> The theme of the quest for identity is intimately connected with the concept of the discovery of self through the process of creation so that the actual creation of a work has become the subject in many contemporary artist novels. (Goldberg qtd. in Stewart 7)

While the artistic focus of Jessica's narrative is the poem, "The Maniac," her narration is the creative work through which she discovers herself. Jessica presents and speaks for herself from beginning to end. The only slight deviation from first person narration is the three letters she receives from her friend, Florence Bone, during her first illness. Wall sees the "lightened. . . tone and limited. . . subject matter" in these letters as proof that Jessica "does not address a child narratee" (256), whereas I see the limitations Jessica imposes on her writing to Florence as another example of her guardedness, or secrecy about communicating to others what she really thinks and feels. She reserves her outpourings for her "journal" or narration. Part of her guardedness is a result of her experience with Miss Dobb's reception of her forty-seven page essay; she faults Jessica's writing for being "so pleased with itself somehow. So self-conscious" (38).

Jessica's narrative voice is influenced not only by her reading but also by her father who writes articles "for *The New Statesman* or something" (114) as well as sermons. Claudia Mills offered a "distillation of the portrait of an author as a young woman" (1) in her 1995 ChLA conference paper "Author and Audience: Fictional Representations of Children as Writers," part of which clearly applies to Jessica and sets her apart from Booky and Jean:

> Our young heroine inherits her writing talent from some male relative: father, grandfather, uncle. In developing it, she is thwarted along the way by at least one female adult figure: an older relative or a teacher. Her precociousness as a writer is clear from the outset; it is recognized by others either with exaggerated awe or with withering scorn. (1)

Jessica's story fits this classical pattern more than Booky's or Jean's. The selection of points I have made is only representative of a few of the many elements of the Künstlerroman at work in *A Long Way From Verona* but they leave no doubt that *Verona* clearly belongs to that tradition.

Readerly Engagement

A Long Way From Verona conforms to the conventions of classical narrative in its use of connective patterns and is, therefore, an example of readerly engaging narrative. The formal structure of the novel is divided into three parts, each of which is integral to the other; together they complete a whole. The connectedness of the plot is a defining feature of the readerly text. In *S/Z* Barthes compares the readerly text to a journey:

> To depart/to travel/to arrive/to stay: the journey is saturated: To end, to fill, to join, to unify—one might say that this is the basic requirement of the *readerly*, as though it were prey to some obsessive fear: that of omitting a connection. (105)

Gardam's reader departs on her journey by travelling back in time to two key events that set the scene for part I, The Maniac, then travels on to The Boy, both of which parts result in, or arrive at, The Poem, the work in the narrative which validates Jessica as a writer beyond all possible doubt. The circle is closed in this progression; none of its parts follows a vector into the unknown. This is not to say that the narrative is not rich in meaning and possibility. Barthes explains the difference in writerly and readerly plurality thus:

> This is the narrative fabric: seemingly subject to the discontinuity of messages, each of which, when it comes into play, is received as a useless supplement (whose very gratuitousness serves to authenticate the fiction by what we have

> called the *reality effect*), but is in fact saturated with pseudo-logical links, relays, doubly oriented terms: in short, it is *calculation* which effects the plenitude of this literature: here dissemination is not the random scattering of meanings toward the infinity of the language but a simple—temporary—suspension of affinitive, already magnetized elements, before they are summoned together to take their place, economically, in the same *package*. (182)

That is to say, the parts which do not seem to fit neatly into the narrative fabric as the reader encounters them for the first time do turn out to be integral or complementary to the whole in the final analysis—unlike the extraneous puzzle pieces in the writerly text. A simplified view of Barthes' model of the readerly and writerly presents the readerly as the tidy package, and the writerly as a barely contained assortment of stuff. Both *Booky* and *Homesick* appear to be neat packages but once the bits and pieces have been taken out and perused they become impossible to contain. And *Verona*, due to its style and narrative construction, which bursts with complexity at its craftily concealed seams, finally fits a neater narrative package than the former do.

Jessica's narrative centers on her sexual awakening. Her concerns with her feelings about people not liking her are juxtaposed with exuberant daydreams about the prisoner she encounters in the seawood, fantasies about Rupert Brooke, and the initial exhilaration of her first date. These experiences are all linked by the mixed feeling of fear and pleasure she feels "in [her] inside. Rather lower than [her] inside. Actually it was quite nice" (45). The key events in the narrative—meeting the prisoner, being caught in the air-raid and the death of Miss Philemon[1]—are all linked with the poem she writes and for which she wins a prize. Jessica's "growth," then, might be said to center on her awareness of her shifting moods and responses to others. She is working out her feelings and beginning to analyze her actions; she is entering the analytic phase of adolescence.

Jessica's narration is overtly readerly. She narrates not only her story but her narrative strategy, pointing out many of the connections. A series of patterns of three prevail throughout the novel. Jessica's encounter with the prisoner is the first element in one of these patterns. One day, on her way back to the Junior School after a visit to the Headmistress, Jessica is so absorbed in thought that she doesn't realize she has taken a forbidden route and suddenly finds herself in the seawood. She forgets all her troubles as she takes in a perfect scene: "I was filled with a sort of sudden overpowering joy and love.[2] The white, lacy little building, the blue man, the scarlet flowers, the heavy golden light. . ." (53), until the blue man, who is the maniac, starts slashing at the dahlias with his knife. She orders him to stop and when he breaks down in tears she ends up patting his head. Suddenly she notices a look in his eyes, turns cold, and marches away. She finds out when she joins her train line that the escaped prisoner is armed and considered terribly dangerous. But try as she might she does not feel afraid or wicked.

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[1] In Greek mythology Philemon and Baucis were the only people to welcome the disguised gods Jupiter and Mercury into their home. Phile means friendly or loving and is therefore an apt name for the teacher figure most supportive of Jessica's writing.

[2] This overwhelming good feeling is another linked pattern. In part II, when she is describing her date with Christian, she is looking at the workmen on the train, thinking about Rupert Brooke, and Christian holding her hand, she exclaims: "I love everything. I love everyone. . . . This is the happiest day of my life. I shall never, never be happier than this. . ." (126). Then again, the day

> On and on in bed I thought about it. On and on about his hair and his wet face and the look in his eyes. "You very preety," he had said. Oh heavens, how awful! But oh heavens, how lovely, too! (55)

The next morning she takes the early train to see Miss Philemon. Jessica doesn't have much patience for adults in general. However, when she feels the need to consult with an adult on matters of importance to her she tends to seek out Miss Philemon. Miss Philemon is not intrusive, and treats Jessica with respect.

Miss Philemon is a branch of the pattern of the "formative" experiences that lead Jessica to write her poem. Miss Philemon, like Arnold Hanger, is an important figure in Jessica's life; they are linked by their defiant comments, Hanger's "to hell with school" is echoed by Miss Philemon's "Order marks! . . . What nonsense!" (43).[1] While Arnold Hanger inspires Jessica's enthusiasm for writing to take direction, Miss Philemon provides her with knowledgeable support in the form of books, stories and advice. Jessica is quite silent on her initial visit to Miss Philemon's flat that morning (and has the first of three out of body experiences[2]). When Jessica rings the bell a second time, feeling she ought to explain her first visit, Miss Philemon's reply is astute but surprising nevertheless:

> "Are you sure you must?" she said. "Some things are much better kept to oneself. Don't feel you have to tell people everything. It is a great mistake. You often lose things if you pass them around. If you have been doing something wrong don't think

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after being caught in the raid on Dunedin Street and being struck on the head by the pot Alsatian, she writes a poem, "The Maniac," "straight out until it was finished" and, after a sleep, wakes up feeling:

> terribly happy for some reason. I wonder if I'm going really mad? They say you go mad about my age sometimes! I thought of Christian. . . . when I'd suddenly felt him holding my hand. I remembered being thrilled by that and my inside twisting around. I didn't feel thrilled now, but I felt terribly happy. Very peculiar. (143)

She is happy about her poem. "There was nothing in it I wanted to change" (143). And, finally, at the end of her narrative she feels "filled with love knowing that good things take place" (190).

[1] Jessica picks up on the style and content of these remarks later in her narrative when she says "loud and clear and most peculiar, 'GOOD RIDDANCE TO BAD RUBBISH'" (141), as Mrs. Fanshawe and her mother leave the church.

[2] Beebe notes that one of the "thematic-technical device[s]" of the Künstlerroman "is the repeated motif of seeing one's self outside one's self" (35). Jessica perceives herself from above, in a sort of aerial view. It happens to her again in church, soon after her parting shot at Mrs. Fanshawe (141-42, see note above), and at the novelty machine at the end of the novel (188).

> you'll get rid of it by passing it to me." (57)

Jessica seeks her out because she is not like other people, but after telling Miss Philemon about her encounter with the Italian prisoner in the sea-wood Jessica feels betrayed: "Why can't she say a bit more? I began to feel fed up. She was being like other people now, hinting things and saying nothing" (59). Jessica wants to be treated like an equal and not like a child who needs to be protected from the grim facts of life. The experience has clearly affected her deeply and has touched something in her that she cannot yet articulate. Although I have said that Jessica's narration is overtly readerly, that does not mean that everything is explained or expressed, the death of Miss Philemon for example. Because Jessica's story is narrated in the first person, the reader has access only to the information she feels like sharing, or deems necessary to her narration. The result is that there are plenty of gaps, the consequence of Jessica's own mental leaps and perceptions, in information and interpretation left for the reader to piece together. Jessica is both upset and excited by her experience in the sea wood. When her attempt to communicate it to Miss Philemon meets with an unsatisfactory response she attempts to dismiss the matter from her mind.

In Part II of the novel a poetry contest is announced which Jessica determines not to enter but ultimately ends up winning as a result of the kernel events in parts I and II, her meeting with the maniac and being literally hit on the head during a bombing. She continues to be preoccupied with her experience in the seawood. She wants to think about her encounter with the prisoner but she can't and is frustrated by her inability, or unwillingness. Her description of the desirability of the day nursery at High Thwaite as "wonderful," "warm" and "full of peace" (100-01) not only evokes the seawood but also contrasts with the chaotic state of affairs in her own home where her mother flies about trying to keep up with her commitments and invariably ends up burning supper.

Jessica's distress comes across as defiant determination to please herself (which is not particularly successful). When she gets dressed for the party at High Thwaite she knows that she should put on her viyella, "You could tell girls had been putting on pale, pretty, nicely-made old party dresses in that room for about thirty thousand years" (104). Her dress-up clothes, on the other hand, "shone from the bed in a violent heap," and make her think of "the dahlias and the orange sunshine and the man's face all tears" (104). She puts them on and further upsets the idyllic scene in the day nursery by tipping the cat off the rocking chair as she announces that she is "not afraid of these people" (104). By putting on the gold tunic and the scarlet tights she embraces the sensuousness and violent beauty of the scene in the seawood. By disturbing the idyllic scene in the day nursery, setting herself into the rocking chair and remarking that her "red satin legs looked good on the fireguard"(104), Jessica wills herself to be both different and accepted. But all the other girls want to wear their viyellas and despite Jessica's determination, "I will not be like them just because it's easier for them. I don't care if they do laugh, I will look beautiful, I will, I will" (105), she ends up being "sensible" (and miserable) after all.

The highlight of her visit to High Thwaite is meeting The Boy, Christian[1] the bourgeois communist. She is rather infatuated with him at first and he thinks she's alright because of the articles her father writes. Some time later they go on a date to see the slums, so that Christian can "educate" her about social injustice, and are caught in an air raid. The result of this is that she is able to write a poem about the maniac—a poem she does not share with the narratee. While this may seem odd, given that it is the event the novel moves toward, the absence of the poem means that the reader can not judge her on that score.[2] Jessica's narration of her own story is ultimately more important than the poem. She feels so happy about her poem that she wonders if perhaps she is going mad. The role of The Boy in Jessica's development as an artist is important because it marks her individuation from her father as a writer in her own right. Her rejection of Christian, who is interested in her in large part because of who her father is, and her successful poem about The Maniac as a result of her catastrophic date with Christian, mark Jessica's independence as an individual and as an artist.

Before submitting her poem to the competition Jessica seeks out Miss Philemon, her mentor figure, for advice. Jessica asks "whether it is really true that if you are really pleased with something you've done you ought to destroy it. . . [because] if you don't, later on you'll be ashamed" (155). After a great deal of discussion Miss Philemon agrees to read the poem and enter it in the competition at her discretion. She ends by telling Jessica that poets aren't given to shame, but that they "burn and suffer and get torn to bits—and they drink and grow fat and quarrel and die. . . . It's not a soft way, Jessica; but at least they're not ashamed" (157). And that is the third and last encounter with Miss Philemon that Jessica describes. Miss Philemon posts Jessica's entry separately. That night the school and the pillar box, where the other entries were posted, are bombed and destroyed.

The clues and evidence of Miss Philemon's death are there in the narrative but Jessica's narration is oblique rather than direct on this matter. Barbara Wall's comment on this part of the book indicates that she feels *Verona* is not readerly enough for children:

> The impact of events on Jessica. . . is so disturbing that in spite of her declared intention in her first paragraph to confront what happens directly and not to let 'things seep out slowly,' she is unable to speak of, or even adequately reveal, some of the things that happen to her. Even experienced adult readers have failed to notice the death in the bombing of Miss Philemon. . . and have consequently missed much of the meaning of the concluding section. (253)

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[1] Jessica's father comments on the irony of Christian's name, considering his convictions: "I say he's got an unfortunate name hasn't he? Poor old thing. He'll change it before long to Will or Hasp or something" (121-22).

[2] In L. M. Montgomery's *Emily* books the reader is also only privy to Emily's unsuccessful literary pieces.

Jessica's narration concentrates on what she does rather than on what she feels for a time. After her school is bombed she takes to reading voraciously. She overhears her parents:

> I heard her [mother] through the floor saying to father, "She'll read her eyes out," but he said, "It's the best thing when there's a death. Leave her alone." (167)

She spends three hours after school reading at the library, then goes home and reads until she falls asleep and continues reading through her lessons at the board school the following day:

> There were several hundred books—novels—in this [book]case, and I decided all of a sudden that I would read them all. I felt that since I was a writer beyond all possible doubt, I ought at some time to go through the works of other writers, and that I probably would never have such a good chance again. I am a very quick reader—I have as I've said, very large, squarish eyes that seem to be able to fit over a good patch of the page. My mother says, "You can't be taking it in," but I do. I wish I read slower as a matter of fact because I can't get books to last. (168)

She continues at this pace for weeks, until she reads Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. This book triggers her feelings and lands her in a depression more terrible than any before:

> I hope I never read another book so utterly terrible as this. . . . It seemed terrible to me that anyone who knew that he was a writer beyond all possible doubt should have not one glimmer, not one faintest trace of happiness in him. There was one thing that he said that beat in my head, over and over and over again. . . . good fortune [did not happen] BECAUSE IT NEVER DOES. (169-70)

This sense of loss and desolation stays with her until the evening of the day on which she receives the poetry prize. Miss Philemon's prediction, that Jessica will lose interest in her poem in three months time, because she will have moved on, turns out to be true. Jessica is convinced there has been a mistake and tries to refuse her prize. Once the reality of the prize sinks in Jessica is overwhelmed by a flood of feelings which set her apart from her friends. After even her friend Florence abandons her, "The trouble with you, Jessica. . . is that you are all feelings. Why don't you use your head?"(177),[1] she wanders about after school, awkwardly carrying a huge picture bought with her prize money, and ends up sitting about the sea-wood until dark.

> I said to myself, "I am here but I am nothing. I see nothing.

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[1] Jessica uses a similar line on Christian earlier:

> "For crying out loud!" I cried out loud, "have you never attempted to use your head? You can't look at things straight, Christian Fanshawe-Smithe. You don't examine the facts. You don't use your head." It was like father speaking. It was terrific and he was actually blushing. (166)

> I know nothing. Whenever I think I know, I don't. It's always lies. What I see turns out to have been always fancy. . . . Just when you think someone's thinking like you do, they give you a blank look and can't remember. . . ."I'm utterly, utterly alone." (183)

Jessica seems to have reached her lowest point. Now that the poetry prize has confirmed her abilities as an artist she feels completely removed from the world. She avoids going home and wanders about until late in the night. Finally, as she is sitting by a novelty machine on her home train platform, she is filled with happiness and, just before a huge search party finds her and sweeps her off home, she sees herself from above once again:

> there I was all of a heap on the bottom step with the picture beside me and that marvellous, beautiful machine, throwing out its chest like a hero.
>
> I looked a poor thing, flopped down beside it and there was someone running up to me— (188)

The next day, in bed with tonsillitis (for the third time), she receives heaps of mail congratulating her on her poem, and she rests secure in the knowledge that there is an antidote to Hardy's utter pessimism; "I just felt filled with love, knowing that good things take place" (190).

Jessica's narration is barmy, anxious, petulant, defiant, scathing, honest and wondrous. She has an excellent command of language ("'Jessica is so *fluent*. Jessie-Carr is so flaaent'"[61]) and an eye and ear for irony, which she reserves for others, and an amazing memory for conversations, of which she remarks, lest anyone doubt her reliability:

> I think I said before. . . that I have a terribly good memory, and so I really do remember all this, every word: though I must say I didn't altogether understand it. (158)

Even though the readerly is preoccupied with making connections they needn't all be understood to enjoy Jessica's narration. In fact, the reader profits by giving more rein to his feelings than to his head. *A Long Way From Verona* is a tightly constructed novel. The connections are all there whether or not they are noticed or grasped. The pleasure of a rigorous readerly novel is that there are always more connections to make whereas the pleasure of a writerly text is the discovery of more and more openings.

Direct Address

An excerpt from Virginia Haviland's review of *A Long Way From Verona* (*Horn Book* 1972) supports the importance of the voice of the first-person narrator in the novel:

> A remarkable, spontaneous, and witty first novel. . . . In a voice striking the reader's ear precisely like the voice of a young person, Jessica Vye, thirteen, tells the story of her home and school life during World War II. . . .

> Jessica's recollections reveal the stupidities of an outmoded private-school regime, the artificialities of adults clinging to social customs, and the strangely erratic conditions of her family's clerical household. In sharing these perceptions with the reader, Jessica reveals her engaging, forthright personality, which is admired by sensitive adults and disparaged by obtuse ones. Best of all is Jessica's expression of her intensely felt critical views on specific books, on her own writing, and her entry into *The Times* poetry contest. . . . A rare book of wit and humor for any age. (359)

Of the three narrators I discuss, Jessica comes the closest to being egocentric; however, her preoccupation with herself is understandable given her age and is a fascinating part of the narrative because of her self-reflexive commentary on how she presents herself. The novel is not only about Jessica; it is about Jessica writing herself. Whereas Jean Fritz addresses her methodology in a foreword and then moves into the story proper, the writing process is part of Jessica's story. Like Jean's, Jessica's commentaries on characters and setting are an active part of her representation of herself as narrator, in terms of how she sees things, yet the process of representation is complicated by Jessica's occasional reassessment of a comment, an admission that it didn't really happen like that, or a dreamlike quality to the sequence that makes the implied reader unsure whether Jessica is narrating her imaginings or her real life experiences. For example, at the end of the letter she writes to her friend, Florence, she says, "and I didn't mean what I said at the beginning of this letter that I'm having an awful time, because I've never been so happy in my whole life" (111). However, she tears off the bottom half of the letter before mailing it.

Jessica's narration is actively engaging because she addresses her reader directly. In order to demonstrate the effects of direct address I will proceed through the first chapter of the novel as I did in chapter II. The difference from passive-engaging narration, or implied address, is evident in the first line.

> I ought to tell you at the beginning that I am not quite normal having had a violent experience at the age of nine. (9)

The opening line is pointedly different from Booky's or Jean's narrative. The reader is immediately addressed: the narrating I establishes her relation to the listener in the very first sentence. The effect both of the immediacy and the directness of the narrator's address is that the text obviously asserts its demands on the reader as a listener in the story from the very beginning. Already in the first sentence one is given the impression that the narrator is a frank person. The narrator, who remains unnamed until the end of the first chapter, feels she "ought" to tell the reader that she is "not quite normal," as if it is only fair, as if it is a necessary piece of information.

> I will make this clear at once because I have noticed that if things seep out slowly through a book the reader is apt to feel let down or tricked in some way when he eventually gets the

> point. (9)[1]

The I presents herself both as an experienced reader and a self-conscious narrator, one who, it appears, has carefully considered her purpose, and who does not wish to lead the reader deliberately astray. But how is she going to tell us everything at once? Despite the narrator's best intentions, her ordering of events is nevertheless bound to manipulate the reader. And despite the overt readerliness of Jessica's narration there are still a number of gaps in it to baffle, trick or let down the reader. Perhaps the trickiest part is the use of immediate-engaging-first-person narration which restricts the reader's ability to judge Jessica's fallibility as a narrator. In order to put her narratee at ease Jessica says:

> I am not, I am glad to say, mad, and there is so far as I know no hereditary madness in my family. The thing that sets me apart from other girls my age—which is to say thirteen— is that when I was nine a man came to our school—it was a private kindergarten sort of school where you could go from five upwards but most girls left when they were eleven unless they were really stupendously dumb—to talk to us about becoming writers. (9)

Presumably, then, the point of this narrative is becoming a writer. The speaker is a thirteen year old with a critical edge; she basically announces the genre of her novel. Like Jean, she delivers her commentary with aplomb and without apology. And as with Jean, the issue of becoming a writer is mentioned at the beginning of the narrative.

> There weren't many of us who had really given a lot of thought to it—to writers at all, let alone to becoming them, and certainly not me, not in actual words and thoughts, that is. *I had for a considerable number of years written things.* There was always a lot of paper lying about in our house, my father being a schoolmaster; and I can't really remember a time when I didn't pick pencils up and write on it. (9 my emphasis)

The voice of the speaker is, however, quite unlike Jean's—her turns of phrase are more self-conscious, more artful (as Jessica will later report: she is an artful child, so knowing) and complex (see italicized passage above). Jean's style is straightforward and simple, her voice is honest, humorous and unapologetic. Jessica's style tends toward the literary, or written, rather than the aural; it is considered and elevated, her voice is a curious blend of honest and affected—as if she is trying to comment on herself as a separate subject—as both outsider and insider.

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[1] This is similar to the opening to E. Nesbit's *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*:

> There are some things I must tell before I begin to tell about the treasure-seeking, because I have read books myself, and I know how beastly it is when a story begins, "'Alas!" said Hildegarde with a deep sigh, "we must look our last on this ancestral home"'—and then some one else says something—and you don't know for pages and pages where the home is, or who Hildegarde is, or anything about it. (15)

Writing is something she has always done—though it is unclear from this passage what is implied by writing: is it an extension of drawing? a form of communication? of self-expression? a remarkable symbiotic relationship with paper?

> It's funny but even now I don't think I could actually *buy* paper. It always seems to me as if it ought to be free. It's like parsons' children and collection. I steal paper sometimes when I'm not thinking. (9-10)

Paper is second nature to her. Although she had never considered becoming a writer in actual words and thoughts, it is no surprise that the man's talk has a profound effect on her. Why it was a "violent experience" is still unclear. But it is obviously important enough not only to be dealt with right away but to be signalled ("I will make this clear at once") as the pivotal event that launches the narrative.

> Well this man came, and we all filed into the biggest classroom and the little ones sat down cross-legged upon the floor and the big ones lounged on chairs behind and then we were told to shush and the door opened and this terribly tired-looking man came in behind the Headmistress. "Girls," she said, "this is Mr Arnold Hanger and he has come a very, very long way to talk to you on the subject of Becoming a Writer. Now I don't really need to intro*duce* you, Mr Hanger, because we all so *love* your books that we really (beam, beam) feel that we know you already." (10)

Jessica has a flair for description. Her affinity for parody and verbal irony marks her writing as that of an experienced reader. The above passage supersedes the simply functional role of description. It captures the absurdity of the situation as Jessica perceives it, which is conveyed by the use of capitalization, italics and parenthetical comments. Her use of verbal irony is another means of direct address because it invites the reader to share directly in the humor of the moment.

> Then she said "Mr Hanger" again rather sharply because he had his chin on his chest and looked as if he was dropping off. "Mr Hanger," she said, "we feel that you are one of our very *oldest* friends." (10)

The text makes the absurdity of the Headmistress' statement quite clear. What makes Mr Hanger interesting at this point is that he seems to have no particular interest in being there or in being a vivacious guest personality. So far the students' response is a mirthful mixture of disbelief in and ridicule of both Mr Hanger and the Headmistress, who speaks for herself and not for them. Jessica describes his reception in a jocular manner:

> Everyone clapped like mad and biffed everyone else's knee and pushed at everyone else's elbow and snuffled, though keeping straight faces because of course NOBODY had ever heard of the man before except I suppose the Headmistress. (10)

Everyone claps because it is expected, not because they know, and like, what they are in for. Not even the other teachers appear to have the faintest clue who this man is, or so Jessica would have us believe. Because of the immediacy of the narration the reader only has Jessica's word for it. Because she is a self-conscious narrator she makes a point of justifying her assertions to draw the reader further in to her version of the story.

> I'm sure none of the other teachers had because they were all either too old to read anything at all any more or they hadn't started learning. It was a fairly peculiar sort of school. (10)

Jessica's indictments are merciless. From her description one has to wonder—as she no doubt expects us to—why anyone would attend such a school. Her assessment of both ancient and new teachers suggests that they are all of a kind: intellectually vapid. Jessica's use of verbal irony foregrounds the humor of the situation and sets the question of truth in the background. Her narration seeks to engage the reader in her personal perceptions, which are the focus of the story.

> The man looked as if he knew it too, and he just slowly lifted his eyelids up as the Head sat down and arranged herself, all powdery, with a modesty-vest and a very low, loose top half and looked up at him all hopeful. (10)

The description of the Headmistress as the coy coquette seeking this very tired man's attention is jarring and absurd—and Jessica does not fail to capture this absurdity in her description or in her reaction.

> It was terribly funny somehow, and the girl sitting next to me and I collapsed and I nearly as anything had to go out. And I suppose my whole life would have been different if I had.
>
> However. (10)

The above passage implies that she had a close call, that she almost didn't become a writer. The brief but potent transitional sentence fragment "however" invites a pause of some kind and then returns the narrative to its purpose.

> Arnold Hanger got up with a deep sigh and looked all round us, and then his face broke into a great, lovely smile all over and he began to talk. And he was absolutely marvellous. Even the Top Form, the really ghastly ones who just sat about yawning all day and were going to do nothing when they left school but sit about yawning all day—it was a posh sort of school —even they sat up and listened. (10-11)

The unexpected all around success of Arnold Hanger makes a lasting impression. Once he gets going his weariness evaporates. Jessica's narration moves from satiric description to genuine appreciation.

> He had a lovely voice and he had brought a lot of books with him with bits of paper stuck in to mark the place, and he kept picking up first one book and then another and reading bits out—long, long bits and sometimes very short bits. Poetry and all sorts. (11)

To demonstrate how riveting this experience is, Jessica gives us a bit of her reading history.

> Well, I was only nine and I wasn't really far off fairy tales. They had had a job getting me started reading at all actually, because I was always wandering about, making these scrawls on my father's foolscap, pressing my face against windows and so forth; WASTING TIME, as they all kept saying. (11)

Jessica is a self-absorbed child; une enfant dans la lune. The word "scrawls" denigrates the writing she does on the paper she finds lying about. However, she seems to be trying to present herself as she thinks the adults view her. "WASTING TIME", in glaring capitals, is a rather adult pronouncement and is no doubt grounded in the fear of running out of time—that terribly finite temporal resource that rules our lives. Obviously no one thought of inspiring Jessica, or had the time to, in quite the way that Mr Hanger evidently manages to.

> He kept on—book after book after book that I'd never even heard of, poems and stories and conversations and bits of plays, all in different voices. And I sat so still I couldn't get up off the floor when it was over, I was so stiff. (11)

Jessica is mesmerized; she is fully engaged to the point of forgetting about herself. A spectacular performance. The experience of having books brought to life is not, in and of itself, violent but has the violent, or powerful, effect of firing up Jessica's enthusiasm about the written word. By now the reader has been exposed to Jessica's two main modes of narration: ironic description and an honest expression of her feelings and perceptions. The combination of these modes demonstrates that Jessica has a sense of humor and that she is also serious. She wants to be trusted.

> The Head thanked him (beam, beam and BEAM) and he suddenly looked sad and tired again and went padding off after her to the door with his head down, while we clapped and clapped. He stood in the door with his back to us for a moment and then he turned round and stared at us; and suddenly he put up his hand and we were quiet. (11)

This clapping is different. It is not dutiful; it is appreciative, enthusiastic, and honestly delighted. Arnold Hanger perceives the difference and acknowledges the response he has generated.

> "Thank you," he said. "I'm glad you enjoyed it. If there is anyone here this afternoon whom I have convinced that books are meant to be enjoyed, that English is nothing to do with duty, that it has nothing to do with school—with exercises and homework and ticks and crosses—then I am a happy man." (11)

And since English is nothing to do with duty, Arnold Hanger throws caution to the wind and makes a final and memorable impression with his parting comment.

> He turned away, but then he turned back again and he suddenly

> simply shouted, he *bellowed* . "To hell with school," he cried. "To hell with school. English is what matters. ENGLISH IS LIFE." The Head grabbed him and led him off to her sitting-room for tea, not looking too thrilled, and we were let out and I went flying home.
>
> * * * (12)

There is a phenomenal amount of energy in this passage. Arnold Hanger's sudden *bellow* , his formidable PROCLAMATION, the shock and displeasure of the Headmistress dragging him off (no need for kicks and screams, he has had his say) is all transformed into the bolt of energy that is Jessica "flying home." (Booky, Jean and Jessica have this dashing tendency in common.)

The three asterisks signal the end of the kernel event in this chapter rather than a temporal break. Jessica's level of activity does not decrease in intensity once she gets home. She is aflame with purpose.

> I got every one of my writings out of my desk and went tearing back again to the school gates—it was miles—but just as I got there I saw the station taxi creaking off and Mr Hanger's hat through the back window. I turned round and went flying off home again, through our garden and out the back to the railway line, and I looked both ways and ran across to the other side and along through the allotments on the railway bank until I came to the slope that led up to the platform, and I ran along it.
>
> I was there before him and I had to wait until he came over the bridge. (12)

At last there is a lull. The description of Arnold Hanger's arrival at the train station provides a remarkable, and effectively engineered, contrast to Jessica's flying about.

> He came very slowly. He had a brown pork-pie hat on and a long tweed coat, rather oldish. He stopped in the middle of the bridge to watch the train come in and look down the funnel and get covered in smoke like my father and I used to do when I was small, before my brother was born. (13)

Arnold Hanger's approach suggests a certain affinity between him and Jessica which is, however, undercut by Jessica's sense of the incongruity of his actions. Getting covered in smoke is fun but it is, in Jessica's mind, a pleasure reserved for the very young and their companions. The birth of a sibling ends the privileged time "when I was small"; suddenly the emphasis is on being "big now." Jessica's observation makes her sound a bit judgmental, but later in the narrative she will resent the idea of being too old, or big, to act "silly." So Arnold Hanger, getting covered in smoke, is also a comforting image—of a grown-up who does what pleases him without the pretense of pleasing a child companion. Arnold Hanger is not someone who fears wasting time.

> And then very slowly, as if he didn't care whether he caught it or not, he tramped down the wooden steps of the footbridge

> towards the carriages. "*Come* along now," the porter shouted, holding a third-class door open, "look alive laddie," and I rushed up just as he stepped in. (12)

Undoubtedly part of the incongruity Jessica perceives in Mr Hanger's unhurried pace is its opposition to her own barely contained desire to rush up to him. Time is a critical factor at this juncture. The writing captures the tension between Jessica's urgency, Mr Hanger's slow approach, and the porter's sense of duty in rushing him along. Jessica catapults herself between Arnold Hanger, the porter, and the door with her wad of paper.

> "Could you look at these?" I said. I pushed in front of the porter and flung all the bits of paper at him. (12)

As she flings "the bits of paper" they scatter like bird shot, surprising Arnold Hanger and disconcerting the porter.

> "Now then!" the porter said. There was a lot of waving and whistling and I could see Arnold Hanger scrabbling about on the floor inside and then fighting with the leather strap that let the window down. (12)

Although the action is clearly proceeding rapidly, the effect of the writing is to slow it down just enough to give it the superimposed effect of silent movie slapstick comedy.

> He only got his head out as the train sailed off the end of the platform, but I managed to keep trotting alongside down the slope and he took off his hat and waved it very courteously, just missing the signal. (12)

The imagery is priceless; the train sailing off, Jessica trotting alongside, and Mr Hanger taking a courteous swipe at the train signal complete the visual sequence of Arnold Hanger's departure. There is only time for a very brief verbal exchange once the window is down and Mr Hanger responds to Jessica's query.

> "Indeed yes. And where shall I return them?" he shouted, and I yelled back "I've put my name and address in." (Actually in those days I was apt to put my name and address on everything I wrote. I used to put it on all kinds of other things—particularly on my arms and thighs. I have noticed that this is characteristic of children of that age.) (12-13)

The parenthetical comment acknowledges the gap between the present of the narrative (then) and the present of the narration (now). The comment shows the older, wiser, thirteen-year-old reflecting on nine-year-old behavior. This narrative moment is a glimpse of the use of situational irony typical of distant-engaging and distancing narratives. Jessica's self-analysis borders on deprecation. Or perhaps self-criticism tempered by humor. The point, nevertheless, is that all the bits of paper are labelled and that her mission has been accomplished.

> When I had had a bit of a to-do with the porter, and been shown out of the luggage entrance I calmed down a little and began to feel silly. (13)

Until this point Jessica has been driven to act on impulse and raw energy. As she contemplates her actions she appears to step outside herself and feels that perhaps she has been childish. She feels embarrassed enough to keep quiet about the whole affair. This passage shows her growing awareness of two orders of behavior, childish impulse versus adult restraint.

> I didn't tell anybody what I'd done and oddly enough nobody at school said much about the talk and neither did I. I watched the post for a day or two and then I rather forgot about it all, which is another thing that happens when you are eight or nine. (13)

She finds it odd because they appear to have forgotten their enthusiasm for Arnold Hanger's performance. "Oddly enough" invites speculation about her presentation of Arnold Hanger's visit—a presentation clearly swayed by her own enthusiasm. The rest of the experiences she will describe are much more recent and do not have the same ring of authoritarian hindsight that mark her comments on being nine years old. Jessica speaks with confidence about the characteristics of nine year olds. Her comments are similar to Maugham's narrator's comments on artists in *The Moon and Sixpence*; they appear to be unequivocal statements about the way of the world. However, once the narration becomes more immediate this type of certainty recedes. There is little, if any, opportunity for authoritarian hindsight in immediate-engaging-first-person narration. The enviable ability of the nine year old to apparently forget both Arnold Hanger and give him all her writings proves to be quite fortunate.

> Just as well because it was months and months later before I heard any more, right in the middle of winter. As a matter of fact it was on the day when we had to leave our house and go to live on the other side of England— "in the vilest part of it", according to mother—because my father had decided to stop being a schoolmaster and to become a curate. (13)

The trauma of moving is built up and then offset by the return of her writings.

Her mother's pronouncement about where they are moving is noteworthy because not only does she not like the location of the new home, she will not enjoy the ramifications of the father's newly chosen profession on her own role: it will run her off her feet.

> We were in the station taxi and mother was crying and Rowley, my brother, was crying too—he was still extremely young and it was about all he ever did—and my father was talking to the taxi man about whether there was going to be a war or not and trying not to look back at the house which still had all our curtains hanging in the windows, and the garden seats on the lawn, and even the swing in the pear tree because the house belonged to the school and most of the things had to be left for the next housemaster and his family. (13)

No one seems particularly pleased to be leaving; a certain amount of resentment is suggested. The speculation about the war is the first indication of the temporal setting of the narrative.

Jessica is especially upset about leaving behind familiar details—curtains, garden seats, swing—for someone else to just take up where her family has left off.

> I said, "We ought to have taken the swing down. It'll rot if it's left out all winter," and father said, "Oh Eaves's will take it down tomorrow. Great fellow, Eaves. He'll paint it and oil it and then store it in the loft. And he'll have the garden seats painted next spring I wouldn't wonder." (13)

The thought of things carrying on as usual without her there is enough to make Jessica join in in the chorus of crying.

> "I like the garden seats peeling," I said and then I started crying, too, and my father yelled, "Great Scot! What's the matter with you all? Willy" (he always knows everyone's name), "Willy get your oars. Your taxi's afloat," and he got his handkerchief out and blew his nose very loudly and then dusted his nostrils violently east to west until his eyes watered. (13)

Jessica admires her father's wit and dramatic flair, yet there is often an undercurrent of annoyance to her admiration. Nevertheless, her narrative voice is clearly influenced by her father's style of blustering pronouncements.

The final event that pulls the threads of the chapter together is writing on paper.

> As he put the handkerchief away he said, "Here, Jessica, I forgot to give it to you. There was a letter for you today," and as the taxi stopped he put into my hands a long, fat envelope typewritten in bright blue and addressed to me. (14)

Arnold Hanger's visit is the first part of Jessica's "violent experience." Her receipt of the fat envelope and the blue typewritten note is the second, clinching part.

> I opened it straight off in the little alley where we had to queue up for our tickets and dropped a whole lot of things that I was supposed to be carrying because mother had Rowley and the baby-bag and a lot of parcels (she is a terrible packer). "Jessica," she said. "Must you read *now*?" and I didn't answer but just looked because there were all my writings again and on the top of them Mr Hanger had pinned a piece of paper and in bright blue typewriting he had said:
>
> JESSSICA VYE YOU ARE A WRITER
> BEYOND ALL POSSIBLE DOUBT!
>
> (14)

What a glorious, prophetic moment. What certainty those capital letters exude. And, at last, her name has been revealed—so that her name and "a writer beyond all possible doubt" are permanently affixed and associated from this point onward.

In effect, this information allows the narrative proper to begin. The first chapter is a necessary analepsis but the story can almost be said to begin anew in chapter two. The opening paragraph of chapter two describes both the immediate impact of Arnold Hanger's bright blue note—which imprints itself on Jessica's psyche—and suggests its future implications.

> This experience changed me utterly, like Heaven, "in the twinkling of an eye", and I believe is the reason for the next point I have to make clear before getting on with the story. Which is that I am not really very popular. Some people in fact do not really like me at all. In fact if you really want to know quite a lot of people absolutely can't stand me. (14)

Reliability

As I stated in chapter I, Jessica Vye has been called an unreliable narrator. This fact reflects and complements the complexity and sophistication of her narrative. Barbara Wall claims that "Jessica is an 'unreliable' narrator, often exposed by her self-contradictions; but the text does not readily yield up its secrets. Only much re-reading will reveal all its intricacy" (256-57). *Verona* is indeed a difficult and uncompromising text; Jessica's narrative is a Künstlerroman and as it is modelled on her reading of adult literature it is not surprising that much of her commentary is precocious. What makes the narrative immediate-engaging rather than distant-engaging or distancing is that there is no clearly identifiable narrating agent to comment on, or point out, the things she does not yet fully understand through dramatic, structural or romantic irony. I prefer to read her admission of uncertainty as teenage realism rather than as adult irony. Further, the lack of explanations of setting, and of cultural and literary allusions can be argued to support the text's realism and immediacy. In this *Verona* is different from *Booky* or *Homesick* because the narrator's voice is not an obvious blend of the focalizer and the implied author and there are no indications that the historically specific material is in any way dated.

Jessica establishes her relationship with the reader at the beginning by proclaiming in a contract-like fashion that she will "make this clear at once" in order not to let the reader "feel let down or tricked in some way when he eventually gets the point" (9). The problem is, however, that she is telling her own story, a story from which she has not gained enough distance to be able to tell it clearly, fully or with any semblance of dispassion. It is a story that is part of her immediate past and therefore she is not unreliable in intention even though she is perhaps unreliable in perspective. Her friend, Florence, points this out to her near the end of the novel:

> "The trouble with you, Jessica," she said, "is that you are all feelings. Why don't you use your head?"
>
> "*What*?" I said.
>
> "Why do you have to get so excited all the time? Don't get in such a *state* all the time. You exaggerate, that's your trouble.

> You see things out of focus, like cows."
>
> "Do cows?"
>
> "Yes—they see things double the size."
>
> "Well, *The Times* newspaper didn't seem to mind." (177-8)

Florence is the voice of reason. "She is very calm and steady" (15), unlike Jessica, and "She doesn't just gasp sympathetically at things, always agreeing with you to your face like a lot of people. She is not easily excited and is able to weigh things up" (30). In other words, she balances Jessica's exuberance and disproportionate views. Florence is the only friend Jessica respects. It is clear from the outset that Jessica's story is influenced by a sense of early adolescent insecurity. She is convinced that she is unpopular and disliked. Florence says, "'I can't see why you expect so much. . . . We like you all right. What on earth do you *want*?'" (15).

Jessica's love of hyperbole and wry wit mark her character and her narration. She freely admits to the parts she is consciously fabricating, like the first part of chapter 15 "(I wasn't there. I'm making this part up. I'd swear to every word though)" (135), and qualifies other passages as dreamlike, the seawood (52) and the church (142) for instance. She presents other comments in a way that emphasizes her impressions of a situation rather than its actuality. For instance:

> I pretended I'd just seen Mrs F-S and I said, "Oh hello." I sounded as if she was just anyone—just an equal—and because of this gift I have I saw that there was nothing I could have done to annoy her more. She would never, ever, forget the way I'd said it. Oh goody and hurray. (140)

This passage is much more telling about Jessica's mood than it is about Mrs Fanshawe-Smithe. At the end of the chapter, after Jessica has written her poem and had a long sleep, she thinks back over the day and is amazed:

> "I'll have to go down and say I'm sorry I suppose, " I thought. "I will go soon. Poor mother. I must have been a bit mad or something. And Mrs Fanshawe-Smithe! Did I dream that? I'm sure I saw her with mother in church. I can't have! I can't have! And being up in the rafters in the chancel. That cobweb. I've been dreaming. (142)

The effect of Jessica's narration, then, is to draw the reader along with her so that the reader experiences the full range of emotion of Jessica's perspective. Her perspective is unreliable in the sense that the reader cannot be sure whether she is relating a situation that actually happened or one that she dreamt or imagined. But the experience of reading immediate-engaging-first-person narration is meant to put the narratee in relation to the narrator in a way that emphasizes the narrator's perception. The narratee, then, has no advantage over the narrator. Thus, the reader has to take Jessica's word for it.

Jessica's word tends to be dramatic and self-centered but, again, this is in keeping with her character. A telling example of her flair for dramatization is her discovery of Arnold Hanger's writing. Her enthusiasm and confidence are seriously dampened:

> I wished with all my heart that nobody had ever put it into my head that I was a writer.
>
> Because it wasn't so. Obviously it wasn't so. If he thought the pastel sunset was good and the lonely cry of the curlew and also thought I was good, then it meant that I was like the pastel sunset and the lonely cry of the curlew. Miss Dobbs was right. I thought of the terrible poem I'd written and shown to Miss Philemon and I wanted to die. It was like finding out in those dreams you get, that standing in church in the middle of the Gloria you haven't got any clothes on. (172)

Although her equation of Arnold Hanger's approval of both the pastel sunset and her own writing as similar is understandable, and perhaps even likely considering he read her writings when she was nine, it is also unfounded. However, because Jessica often gives more rein to her feelings than to her head and because she is easily influenced (and has been reading *Jude the Obscure* just prior to this discovery) she reaches an emotional low point at this juncture in her narrative. Jessica's voice, tone and vision are true to her perception and interpretation of events. Her expression is reliable in that she is trying to honestly communicate her experiences. Because she uses immediate-engaging-first-person narration the reader is limited to her immediate interpretation of events unless she includes someone else's commentary, like Florence's, as part of her narration. The result of immediate-engaging-first-person narration is a strong sense of the narrator's character and voice, neither of which are compromised by the additional or overriding voice of a narrating agent.

The importance of young adult as a category

The narrator's voice, tone and vision significantly determine the relationship between the narrator and narratee in immediate-engaging-first-person narration. Tone and vision are stumbling blocks in Barbara Wall's discussion of *A Long Way From Verona*. In *The Voice of the Narrator*, Wall distinguishes between literature that has been written "to children", and literature that has been written "for children." Wall feels that *Verona*'s implied reader is not a child because Jessica is precocious and egocentric:

> [Her] commitment to writing expressed so strongly at the beginning and demonstrated constantly by her elaborately detailed presentation of individual episodes makes it difficult for Jessica to address her peers. She is too interested in herself and her status as a writer to care much about whom she is addressing. It is true that a narratee is often directly addressed. (255)
> In spite of the rather childish and chatty tone of the narrator, the narratee is obviously not a young contemporary, but someone who is interested in writing and the principles of selection. . . . Her voice is the voice of a mature and complex young person confiding, as such a child does at that age, not

> in her peers, but in someone older and wiser, whose half-imagined presence allows her to define herself. (256)

If thirteen year old Jessica is interested in writing and principles of selection, might this not interest other thirteen-year-olds as well? Jessica may be addressing someone older but the "you" she addresses is not accompanied by any specific data, the narratee is not characterized, and therefore any attempt to define whom she speaks to is speculative. Wall is quite right in saying that Jessica is "unlike the 'typical' contemporary child narrator" (254-55). But is this a problem? Does this make the book not-for-children? The problem is, in fact, Wall's definition of children, boys and girls under the age of twelve to thirteen, in conjunction with her presupposition that since Jessica, as narrator, is thirteen her narrative "must be suitable for eleven-year-olds, since children usually wish to read about characters a little older than themselves" (253). According to Wall's definition of children, I would agree that *A Long Way From Verona* is not a children's book. Perhaps Wall's criticism of it would not have been as harsh if she had considered it as young adult literature. Must a first-person narrative necessarily be addressed to the narrator's age group to be effective young adult literature? If the book is not suitable for eleven-year-olds, and perhaps not even for many thirteen-year-olds, might it not be very appropriate for sixteen-year-olds? Is it a problem that the narrator is a precocious thirteen-year-old? Have children been so conditioned to read only about people their own age or older that they can't be convinced to look back? If *A Long Way From Verona* is a book "for adults," then it is one of the few novel length adult immediate-engaging-first-person narratives I have encountered so far.

One of the most untidy things about children's literature is its refusal to be easily classified and categorized, even though that is one of the first things that happens to it, often even as it is being conceived. *That Scatterbrain Booky* and *Homesick* fit Barbara Wall's definition of literature written to children. But there is nothing that marks them as not-for-young-adults. Certainly *With Love from Booky* and *As Ever, Booky* fit the YA category because of Booky's increasing age. I could expand on Wall's thesis and propose a "writing to young adults," a category Wall completely omits. I grant Wall's point that Verona's "technique is oblique and its ironies complex" (253) with hesitation because she sees this complexity as a kind of flaw, on which basis she concludes:

> The difficulties here stem from the fact that Gardam has not written for children and has not addressed them. In many ways her book is out of their reach. *A Long Way From Verona* suffers, and is in fact misunderstood, if regarded as a children's book. Rather it should be seen as an adult book, which, like *The Lord of the Flies*, has much to offer children when assisted by good teaching. (257)

It strikes me as marvellously ironic that Gardam's book, like Jessica herself in the story, has been misunderstood by an adult determined to view book and character as too knowing for a child. Jessica is not a child in the comfortable sense of the word. Nor is she an adult. And if *A Long Way From Verona* is not a children's book, that does not, therefore, make it an adult book (which is not to say that adults can't read it and enjoy it). Aidan Chambers uses the example of Golding's novel to make a point about child characters in narratives and child readers that is well worth noting at this juncture:

> It does not follow, of course, that a writer who places a child at the narrative center of his tale necessarily or even intentionally forges an alliance with children. *Lord of the Flies* is entirely peopled by children, but no one would call it a book for children in any sense. (Adolescents enjoy it—or at least their teachers have decided they shall study it; *but adolescents are not children*, an understanding I have so far taken for granted.) (*Booktalk* 43 my emphasis)

Jessica's narrative captures the confusion and exuberance of adolescence. If it suffers from anything, it is unfair criticism. Wall feels that Jessica "takes herself too seriously and is therefore often a victim of the author's irony" (255). Whatever irony is in the text, it is the narrator's irony, that is, the irony of a thirteen-year-old, not of the implied author. If it weren't, the narrative would be distancing, not engaging.

"Adolescent novel of ideas"

I have repeatedly suggested that *A Long Way From Verona* is a work of a different register than *Booky* or *Homesick*. Jessica's narrative appears to be more complex than Booky's or Jean's because it is brim full of historical, literary and religious allusions which are left for the reader to sort out. David Rees comments:

> Jane Gardam makes few concessions: for the average or below average reader, her full-length books are difficult in language and in concept. References to many of the great works of English literature are frequent. She assumes her audience has some knowledge of the geography, customs and speech patterns of Northern England, and—in her first two books—some awareness of the events of the Second World War and the prevailing moods and attitudes of that time. Though their backgrounds are not comfortable or privileged, her protagonists are almost exclusively middle-class and highly intelligent. . . (160)

Rees does not view Gardam's lack of concessions, or the fact that she is less widely popular than the likes of Roald Dahl, as a problem; he concludes, "But if a story profoundly touches the life of just one child or teenager it is probably worth publishing, and Jane Gardam's young admirers can certainly be counted in more than single figures" (160). One might explain the difference between Jane Gardam and Bernice Thurman Hunter and Jean Fritz by noting that Jane Gardam says that she does not write with a view to any specific audience; she just writes. Fritz and Hunter, on the other hand, make a conscious effort to provide explanations or context for the historical periods they write about which are geared at young readers.[1] This is reflected by Fritz and Hunter's use of a blended narrator and passive narration. Passive narration allows the reader to be more of a passive listener than active narration, which directly asks the reader to respond in some way. The blended voice of the narrator in Fritz's and Hunter's texts ensures that the narrative anticipates most of the reader's questions and their texts are therefore also easier to understand. There is more to the difference between Gardam and Fritz and Hunter than that, however.

In Peter Hollindale's discussion, in "The Adolescent Novel of Ideas," of the enormous range of writing for adolescents he argues that despite "lots of rubbish" (85),

> the fact remains that over the years since 1970 a highly intelligent and demanding literature has emerged which speaks with particular directness to the young adult mind—the mind which is freshly mature and intellectually confident, mentally supple and relatively free of ideological harness. (86)

A Long Way From Verona is a book that speaks with such directness. Hollindale identifies a particular kind of novel, namely the "adolescent novel of ideas", which " embraces those books which 'grow the mind a size larger'" (86). Hollindale succinctly explains the disparity between the extremes of adolescent novels:

> To put the critical problem crudely: How can we discuss the adolescent novel when at one extreme it is a simple children's book with added sex, violence, and family collapse, while at the other it asks questions about *Homo sapiens* which most adult readers are too frightened or too stuck in their ways to face up to? (85)

While neither *Booky, Homesick* nor *Verona* are "simple" children's books with some social reality thrown in, only *Verona* is demanding of its reader in the way Hollindale describes. The fact that *Verona* asks its reader to face difficult subject matter, notably war and death, makes it easy for critics, and for some critics probably desirable, to want to disavow the possibility that it is a book for not-yet-adult readers.

Hollindale remarks that the writers he has chosen for discussion[2] are "of great imaginative gifts and also of high political and philosophical intelligence, delighting in patterns, analogies, and concepts, a combination of which is not unduly common in novelists at any level" (86), which can equally be said of Jane

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[1] In part I of "On Writing for Children: Some Wasps in the Marmalade", Jane Gardam states:

> Each book I have written I have desperately wanted to write. Whether or not they had anything to do with children has never occured to me. I have never liked children's books very much. I don't read very many. And I am frightened to death of declared children's writers who can paraphrase the Plowden Report and know exactly what they are up to and where they are going.
>
> I have not the faintest idea where I am going, whom I am writing for, or why I am compelled to write fiction at all. (489)

[2] Robert Cormier, Ursula LeGuin and Peter Dickinson

Gardam. While Hollindale concentrates on fantasy writers and stresses ideas over character, I feel that his argument for the adolescent novel of ideas as a distinguishing feature of literature for youth is vital to the field of children's literature. I believe that a more general understanding thereof can easily encompass a greater range of different genres and their respective means of presenting ideas, albeit not necessarily always in the philosophical fashion Hollindale's definition suggests. *A Long Way From Verona* is a work of realism and focuses on character. It is a young girl's meditation on a number of matters that dictate the normalcy of her daily experiences. While the hardships imposed by the Second World War are not foregrounded they are also inescapable. Jessica's narration subtly explores the psychological effects of rationing, air raids and death on her development as a young woman in a novel that is ostensibly an exploration of her development as an artist. While *A Long Way From Verona* is not an adolescent novel of ideas as such, its realism is grounded in the tension between Jessica's descriptions of the socio-political realities she observes around her and the more philosophical matter of how to effect her self-representation in her writing.*Verona* demonstrates that the narration of an artist's self-portrait of a limited portion of her adolescence is only temporally different from a longer range view, and further, that the author's use of a young narrator-protagonist enables her to dispense both with the traditionally male pattern of the Künstlerroman and women's subsequent reworking of that pattern than would the description of an adult narrator-protagonist whose "ideological harness" is more fully realized.

Verona also clearly demonstrates that adolescence is a time that can be marked by a demonstration of intellectual experimentation and prowess, or of intellectual confidence and mental suppleness. Jessica is a bright child and she is aware of it, and delights in it. But being bright is not necessarily a blessing, as her narration makes amply clear. Jessica's sophisticated use of language is not an anomaly in young adult fiction. Charlotte, the narrator of Jan Mark's *They Do Things Differently There*, has a similarly trenchant tone and is also a master of thinly veiled sarcasm and irony. Her description of the town she lives in reverberates with the same disdain and playful pleasure in clever language that marks Jessica's description of the high society she meets at High Thwaite. Both Jessica's and Charlotte's narration delights in social critique and express a certain unease with their social environment. *Verona* is "difficult" because of its use of direct address and the complexity of its readerly structure. Both of these affect the reader's engagement in the text. In the case of Jessica's narration, direct address is not coupled with the use of a blended voice and so the reader is confronted with what amounts to the uncompromising voice of a narrator who reminds the reader, every now and then, of his position as listener in the story. These active reminders implicate the reader in the narrative because they require some kind of response. The readerly structure of the narration, on the other hand, demands that the reader notice and take stock of the "patterns, analogies and concepts" that make up the text in order to demonstrate her engagement in it.

"Difficult" novels create their share of critical angst about appropriateness and accessibility; nevertheless, these novels prove that young adult fiction is *not* "an unnecessary commercial invention, impeding progress to adult reading and pandering to teenage immaturity and emotional narcissism" (Hollindale 85). *A Long Way From Verona* is not a "better" book than *Booky* or *Homesick* because it is more difficult; but it is an important book because it uses narrative strategies, namely active address and the single voice of the focalizer-narrator (as opposed to the blended voice of the implied author and focalizer as narrator), that are more typical of YA fiction for older readers and which thereby results in a highly intelligent and demanding narration by a thirteen year old. *Verona* is already on par with adult reading; it does not pander to immaturity or narcissism.

CONCLUSION

> Our teenage years are important ones. To despise or deny or simply forget the teenager who lives in all of us is in itself an adolescent attitude, one that treats that crucial passage as if it were a disease. (Pennac 193)

> To reread that which once rejected us, to reread every word, to reread in a different light, to reread to check our first impressions: this is one of our rights.
>
> But we can also reread for the hell of it, for the pleasure of repetition, for the happiness of encountering an old friend and putting our friendship to the test once again.
>
> "One more time!" we would say when we were young. As adults, we reread for the same reason. We want the enchantment of an old pleasure that, each time, is rich in new magic. (Pennac 187)

My exploration of Booky's, Jean's and Jessica's narration demonstrates not only that the years from early to middle adolescence are important, but that childhood can be convincingly reconstructed as a blend of fiction and autobiography. I have sought to demonstrate that the success of each girl's narration hinges on her use of immediate-engaging-first-person narration. By restricting the narration to the focalizer's understanding and perception of events that have recently taken place, and events that are therefore not likely to be fully understood yet, the narration is propelled by a movement foreward into what Fritz calls the Unknown. This progression "preserve[s] the sense of immediacy" ("The Known" 172) that Fritz identifies as vital to both fiction and biography, an immediacy she fosters in her autobiography as well. It is this very immediacy and the "limitation" to the narrator-focalizer's interpretation of events that alters the characteristics heretofore governing genres such as the Bildungsroman, autobiography and the Künstlerroman, all of which have been premised on the distance between the narrating agent and the narrated subject. That is to say, the definitions of these genres must be modified if their forms are to be used by immediate-engaging-first-person narrators. I have examined how Booky's narrative adapts the conventions of the Bildungsroman and how Jessica's narrative reflects those of the Künstlerroman. In the case of *Homesick* I have gone into a more thorough analysis of genre, because the idea of an autobiography of childhood was already in place and needed, therefore, to be addressed not only in the context of autobiography, but also in the context of autobiography written for children and autobiography narrated by a child. Immediate-engaging-first-person narration is a vital type of narration in young adult literature because it allows the narrator to express her experiences of the "crucial passage" of adolescence in a way that stresses their immediacy and invites the reader to share in them in an experiential rather than in an analytic way. Immediate-engaging-first-person is important to young adult literature because it values experience over didacticism and because it privileges the voice of the narrator-focalizer and, thus, the voice of youth's experience.

In view of the fact that first-person narration is frequently used in young adult realistic fiction, it is valuable to consider how it is used. I could rephrase Daniel Pennac's comment, "Our reasons for reading are as eccentric as our reasons for living" (206), as "An author's use of first-person narration can be as varied as people's ways of living." The variety in first-person narration would benefit from a bit of cataloguing in order to enable us to discuss it more precisely. The three types of first-person narration I have identified, immediate-engaging, distant-engaging and distancing narration, distinguish between the narratives of narrator-protagonists. Immediate-engaging-first-person narration, which I have focused on, can be further distinguished depending on whether the narrator's address to the narratee is implied (passive narration) or direct (active narration). Passive-immediate-engaging-first-person narration often makes use of a blended voice for the narrator. The narrator's voice is a blend of the focalizer and the implied author. The implied author is evident in descriptive or explanatory passages, as I demonstrated in my discussion of *Booky* and *Homesick*. A blended voice tends to be more evident when the narrator is still quite young. Booky is nine and ten in the first book of the *Booky* trilogy. Jean is eleven and twelve and has, as I've shown, rather protective parents. Jessica's use of direct address appears to preclude the possibility of a blended voice; however, although a blended voice is more typical of passive narration and of younger narrators, it is not inconceivable for it to be used in either direct address or by an older narrator or a combination of both.

Immediate-engaging-first-person narration can also be distinguished by whether it invites readerly or writerly engagement. This distinction is based on the way the text works on the reader: is it structured by connections (readerly) or by openings (writerly)? Both the readerly and the writerly text contain a multiplicity of meanings and possibilities. In the process of rereading texts we can become aware not only of the assumptions we bring to the text and those that have been built into the text, but also of how the text works on its readers and invites them either to make connections or to seek openings in the text. One kind of "new magic" afforded by rereading is the magic of plurality. Although the words on the page remain the same, every reading is a new reading and the meaning of the text changes in some way that ranges from the subtle to the startling. Not only can the meaning of the text change, the reader's level of engagement in the narrative can also vary from one reading to another. I have shown how an apparently straightforward narrative like *That Scatterbrain Booky* can become quite complex and unstable when considered as writerly engagement; and, conversely, how a decidedly complex and demanding narrative like *A Long Way From Verona* is "difficult" because of its very stability and the tight weave of its readerly engagement.

The theory I have outlined and explored in relation to *Booky, Homesick* and *Verona* can be extended to help those who work with "real" child and young adult readers to refine, and become more specific about, the concept of first-person narration by making child and young adult readers aware of the different types of first-person narration. Ultimately, I would hope that expanding young adult readers' abilities to understand their engagement in a narrative and giving them the necessary terminology will enable them to articulate their like or dislike of a particular work more fully on both a technical and a personal level. The technical level corresponds to the type of engagement and the personal level, which basically amounts to one of taste, corresponds to the level of engagement. I have suggested that there are three levels of engagement, full, partial and non- or dis-engagement, which, again, are meant to help pinpoint a reader's attitude toward a text more precisely. Often, the type of narration and the reader's level of engagement in the narration go hand in hand. And yet, it is possible to discuss the type and level of engagement separately.

The role of the reader is central to the production of meaning and it is important to remember that reading involves a relationship between the text and the reader. It is important to foster this relationship during adolescence because adolescence is also a "crucial passage" in the formation of the reader. Perhaps, as Pennac suggests, it is also important to demystify the relation between text and reader somewhat so that young adult readers are able to evaluate both their responses to a text and the text's effect on them. Pennac explains,

> A great novel that keeps us on the outside is not necessarily more difficult than any other. Between its greatness and our ability to understand, a shadow falls. The chemical reaction simply doesn't occur. One day we'll empathize with Borges' work, though it's kept us at a distance for years, whereas we may never reduce the distance between ourselves and Musil.
>
> We have a choice. We can conclude that it's all our fault, that we're a few bricks shy of a load, that deep down we're basically stupid. Or we can appeal to the very controversial notion of taste and begin to explore what our tastes are. I say we offer the second solution to the young readers in our lives.
>
> It has the advantage of offering a rare pleasure of rereading and understanding why they didn't like a certain book. And when some pedantic literature teacher brays, "How can anyone not like Henry James?" they can always give this simple answer.
>
> "There's no accounting for taste." (186)

Perhaps that is why the deceptively simple question "Why did you like, or dislike, this book?" is so important, though often difficult, to answer. There is no question that taste has an effect on our level of engagement in a text. Meanwhile, the immediacy of a text or distance between ourselves and a text can usually also be explained by its narrator's form of address, voice and narrated subject.

It is also important to distinguish immediate-engaging-first-person narration from its counterparts because immediate-narration has a significant effect on genres that lend themselves to first-person narration. I have explored three of these, the Bildungsroman, autobiography and the Künstlerroman. Because immediate-engaging narration does not use dramatic, structural or romantic irony and is, by definition, limited to the use of verbal irony it alters the characteristics of these genres as they have been previously defined. At this point it seems as though this alteration is a function of young adult literature but there is certainly no need for this to remain the case. The use of immediate-engaging-first-person narration is not prohibited in "adult" fiction; it just hasn't yet been much explored outside the epistolary novel, the diary, the short story and narratives of madness.

Rather than simply viewing immediate-engaging-first-person narration as the most limited form of first-person narration, we might consider its advantages: immediate-engaging-first-person narration does not seek to make sense of events; it only seeks to record them because the narrator deems them significant. As Owen, the narrator of Ursula LeGuin's *Very Far Away From Anywhere Else* says, "I don't know what I achieved in the six months I'm going to tell about. I achieved something, all right, but I think it may take me the rest of my life to find out what" (1). The closest he comes to naming his subject is, "That is partly what this thing I'm telling, this story, is about. About being a bright little jerk" (2). The other distinguishing trend in immediate-engaging-first-person narration is that the narrative covers a relatively short span of time in the recent past, often no more than a year. To use Owen's observations, again, this time from the end of his narration: "There is more, of course, but that seems to be all of this thing I wanted to tell. The 'more' is just what happened next and keeps on happening—each day's new gorilla nest" (85). Immediate-engaging-first-person narration, then, is an important band in the spectrum of ways of telling a story. While distancing narration allows an older and wiser narrator to reflect back on her life in an analytic and ironic way, and, while distant-engaging narration allows an older and wiser narrator to comment on and explain her past actions with a view toward understanding both her motivations at the time, and the consequences of those actions without judging them from the vantage point of experience, immediate-engaging narration allows the narrator to tell the story of what has recently taken place in her life, the meaning of which may not yet be clear, but the expression of which is necessary to the process of understanding. The reader of immediate-engaging narration participates in the narrator's process of understanding and, thus, in the production of meaning, by becoming the listener in the story and thereby engaging in it first on one level, a level which is then open to change upon each rereading.

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